

RELIGIOUS STUDIES (RELS)

RELS 0003 History, Culture, and Religion in Early India

This course surveys the culture, religion and history of India from 2500 BCE to 1200 CE. The course examines the major cultural, religious and social factors that shaped the course of early Indian history.

The following themes will be covered: the rise and fall of Harappan civilization, the "Aryan Invasion" and Vedic India, the rise of cities, states and the religions of Buddhism and Jainism, the historical context of the growth of classical Hinduism, including the Mahabharata, Ramayana and the development of the theistic temple cults of Saivism and Vaisnavism, processes of medieval agrarian expansion and cultic incorporation as well as the spread of early Indian cultural ideas in Southeast Asia. In addition to assigned secondary readings students will read select primary sources on the history of religion and culture of early India, including Vedic and Buddhist texts, Puranas and medieval temple inscriptions. Major objectives of the course will be to draw attention to India's early cultural and religious past and to assess contemporary concerns and ideologies in influencing our understanding and representation of that past.

Fall or Spring

Also Offered As: HIST 0755, SAST 0003

1 Course Unit

RELS 0004 Myths and Religions of the Ancient World

This course will survey the religions of the ancient Middle East, situating each in its historical and socio-cultural context and focusing on the key issues of concern to humanity: creation, birth, the place of humans in the order of the universe, death, and destruction. The course will cover not only the better-known cultures from the area, such as Egypt and Mesopotamia, but also some lesser-known traditions, such as those of the Hittites, or of the ancient Mediterranean town of Ugarit. Religion will not be viewed merely as a separate, sealed-off element of the ancient societies, but rather as an element in various cultural contexts, for example, the relationship between religion and magic and the role of religion in politics will be recurring topics in the survey. Background readings for the lectures will be drawn not only from the modern scholarly literature, but also from the words of the ancients themselves in the form of their myths, rituals, and liturgies.

Not Offered Every Year

Also Offered As: ANCH 1203, MELC 0004

1 Course Unit

RELS 0006 Hindu Mythology

Premodern India produced some of the world's greatest myths and stories: tales of gods, goddesses, heroes, princesses, kings and lovers that continue to capture the imaginations of millions of readers and hearers. In this course, we will look closely at some of these stories especially as found in Purana-s, great compendia composed in Sanskrit, including the chief stories of the central gods of Hinduism: Visnu, Siva, and the Goddess. We will also consider the relationship between these texts and the earlier myths of the Vedas and the Indian Epics, the diversity of the narrative and mythic materials within and across different texts, and the re-imagining of these stories in the modern world.

Fall or Spring

Also Offered As: COML 0006, SAST 0006

1 Course Unit

RELS 0008 India: Culture and Society

What makes India INDIA? Religion and Philosophy? Architectural splendor? Kingdoms? Caste? The position of women? This course will introduce students to India by studying a range of social and cultural institutions that have historically assumed to be definitive India. Through primary texts, novels and historical sociological analysis, we will ask how these institutions have been reproduced and transformed, and assess their significance for contemporary Indian society.

Fall or Spring

Also Offered As: HIST 0851, SAST 0008

1 Course Unit

RELS 0020 Religions of the West

This course surveys the intertwined histories of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. We will focus on the shared stories which connect these three traditions, and the ways in which communities distinguished themselves in such shared spaces. We will mostly survey literature, but will also address material culture and ritual practice, to seek answers to the following questions: How do myths emerge? What do stories do? What is the relationship between religion and myth-making? What is scripture, and what is its function in creating religious communities? How do communities remember and forget the past? Through which lenses and with which tools do we define "the West"?

Fall or Spring

Also Offered As: JWST 0020

1 Course Unit

RELS 0040 Art and Religion

What is religious art and what makes art religious? This course will survey a wide variety of artistic expressions from a number of religious traditions which draw on spiritual themes, are inspired by religious experiences or texts, and which serve an important role in religious practice and belief. Some of the themes which this course will explore are: visualization and action within the cosmos, passion and religious ecstasy, the material culture of personal devotion, icons and iconoclasm, depictions of the miraculous, and the relationship between word and image. Objects and images from Christianity, Islam, Judaism, and Buddhism and will be explored along with examples from other traditions.

Fall or Spring

1 Course Unit

RELS 0050 Gender, Sexuality, and Religion

What does it mean to be a gendered individual in a Muslim, Hindu, Jewish, Christian, or Buddhist religious tradition? How important are gender differences in deciding social roles, ritual activities, and spiritual vocations? This course tackles these questions, showing how gender - how it is taught, performed, and regulated - is central to understanding religion. In this course we will learn about gendered rituals, social roles, and mythologies in a range of religious traditions. We will also look at the central significance of gender to the field of religious studies generally. Part of the course will be focused on building a foundation of knowledge about a range of religious traditions and the role of gender in those traditions. This course focuses on religious traditions with origins outside the West. Although it is beyond the scope of this class to offer comprehensive discussions of any one religious tradition, the aim is to provide entry points into the study of religious traditions through the lens of gender. This course will train you in historical, anthropological, and theoretical methodologies. We will also read religion through feminist and queer lenses - we will explore the key characteristics of diverse feminist and queer studies approaches to religion, as well as limits of those approaches.

Fall

Also Offered As: GSWS 0050

1 Course Unit

RELS 0055 Introduction to Indian Philosophy

This course will take the student through the major topics of Indian philosophy by first introducing the fundamental concepts and terms that are necessary for a deeper understanding of themes that pervade the philosophical literature of India – arguments for and against the existence of God, for example, the ontological status of external objects, the means of valid knowledge, standards of proof, the discourse on the aims of life. The readings will emphasize classical Hindu, Buddhist, and Jain philosophical articulations (from 700 B.C.E to 16th century CE) but we will also supplement our study of these materials with contemporary or relatively recent philosophical writings in modern India.

Fall or Spring

Also Offered As: PHIL 1252, SAST 0050

1 Course Unit

RELS 0080 Religion and Sports: Sacred Games and the Spirit of Competition

Professional football player Tim Tebow used to publicly kneel in prayer before almost every game. Elite runner Mo Farah rescheduled his Ramadan fast in 2011 when the Muslim month of fasting coincided with the world championships. What happens when religion and sports meet? Can a sport really be a religion? How do sports communities grapple with questions of equity and power, particularly in Philadelphia? By the end of this course you will be able to articulate a sophisticated answer to these two questions and be better prepared to understand and interpret the role of sports in society today. This course will teach you how to think about sports as ritual that brings people together, divides them, and gives athletes the power to remake themselves through the way they use and talk about their bodies. We will first look at the ceremonial and ritual aspects of sports from the view of the spectator or fan, considering the question of whether sports teams are functionally similar to religion. Then we will look at the ritual aspect of sport from the viewpoint of the athlete, considering the ways that athletes use their bodies in sports to foster community and self-realization. There will be a secondary focus on raising ethical questions through a discussion of case studies based on real events. Issues of religion, race, ethnicity, gender, age and disability will be prominently featured. There will be guest speakers- athletic and academic and at least one class visit to a sporting event. Sports discussed include but are not limited to American Football, Baseball, Cricket, Wrestling, Football (Soccer), Basketball and Track & Field.

Spring

1 Course Unit

RELS 0088 Penitentiaries to PILOTs: Religion and Institutions in Pennsylvania

This first-year seminar examines how religion works on, in, and through institutions such as penitentiaries, residential facilities for Native children, private universities, for-profit corporations, and public schools. Focusing on the State of Pennsylvania and the City of Philadelphia as examples of broader national trends, we investigate the fraught religious history of many local educational, correctional, and cultural institutions. The class begins with a field trip to the local Eastern State Penitentiary—the first prison in the world that focused on fostering religious penitence as a mode of rehabilitation—and ends by considering recent calls for the tax-exempt University of Pennsylvania to offer Payments in Lieu of Taxes (PILOTs) to the City of Philadelphia. We consider topics such as the role of religion in prison culture, federal and supreme court cases related to mandatory schoolhouse rituals such as Bible reading and the flag salute, and the precursors and aftermath of the 1985 MOVE bombing (a notorious incident in which the Philadelphia police dropped C4 explosives on the residence of a marginalized religious movement, destroying more than 60 homes in West Philadelphia).

Fall, odd numbered years only

1 Course Unit

RELS 0130 Gods, Ghosts, and Monsters

This course seeks to be a broad introduction. It introduces students to the diversity of doctrines held and practices performed, and art produced about "the fantastic" from earliest times to the present. The fantastic (the uncanny or supernatural) is a fundamental category in the scholarly study of religion, art, anthropology, and literature. This course will focus both theoretical approaches to studying supernatural beings from a Religious Studies perspective while drawing examples from Buddhist, Shinto, Christian, Hindu, Jain, Zoroastrian, Egyptian, Central Asian, Native American, and Afro-Caribbean sources from earliest examples to the present including mural, image, manuscript, film, codex, and even comic books. It will also introduce students to related humanistic categories of study: material and visual culture, theodicy, cosmology, shamanism, transcendentalism, soteriology, eschatology, phantasmagoria, spiritualism, mysticism, theophany, and the historical power of rumor. It will serve as a gateway course into the study of Religion among numerous Asian, and East Asian Studies, as well as Visual Culture and Film Studies. It will include guest lectures from professors from several departments, as well as an extensive hands-on use of the collections of the Penn Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology and the manuscripts held in the Schoenberg Collection of Van Pelt Library. It aims to not only introduce students to major, approaches, and terms in the study of religion and the supernatural, but inspire them to take more advanced courses by Ilya Vinitsky, Liliane Weissberg, Projit Mukharji, Talya Fishman, Annette Reed, David Barnes, David Spafford, Frank Chance, Michael Meister, Paul Goldin, Renata Holod, Paul Rozin, among several others.

Fall

Also Offered As: EALC 0502

1 Course Unit

RELS 0180 Saints and Devils in Russian Literature and Tradition

This course is about Russian cultural imagination, which is populated with "saints" and "devils": believers and outcasts, the righteous and the sinners, virtuous women and fallen angels, holy men and their most bitter adversary - the devil. In Russia, where people's frame of mind has been formed by a mix of Eastern Orthodox Christianity and earlier pagan beliefs, the quest for faith, spirituality, and the meaning of life has invariably been connected with religious matters. How can one find the right path in life? Can a sinner be redeemed? Should one live for God or for the people? Does God even exist? In "Saints and Devils," we read works of the great masters of Russian literature and learn about the historic trends that have filled Russia's literature and art with religious and mystical spirit. Among our readings are old cautionary tales of crafty demons and all-forbearing saints, about virtuous harlots and holy fools, as well as fantastic stories by Nikolai Gogol about pacts with the devil, and a romantic vision of a fallen angel by Yuri Lermontov. We will be in awe of the righteous portrayed by Nikolai Leskov and follow the characters of Fedor Dostoevsky, Leo Tolstoy and Anton Chekhov, as they ponder life and death and search for truth, faith, and love. In sum, over the course of this semester we will talk about ancient cultural traditions, remarkable works of art, and the great artists who created them. In addition to providing a basic introduction to Russian literature, religion, and culture, the course introduces students to literary works of various genres and teaches basic techniques of literary analysis. (No previous knowledge of Russian literature necessary. All readings are in English).

Not Offered Every Year

Also Offered As: COML 2013, REES 0180

1 Course Unit

RELS 0215 The Religion of Ancient Egypt

Weekly lectures (some of which will be illustrated) and a field trip to the University Museum's Egyptian Section. The multifaceted approach to the subject matter covers such topics as funerary literature and religion, cults, magic religious art and architecture, and the religion of daily life. Not Offered Every Year

Also Offered As: MELC 0215, NELC 0215

Mutually Exclusive: MELC 6125

1 Course Unit

RELS 0250 Jerusalem: Holy City

This course will survey the cultural history of Jerusalem over three millennia with a special focus on its configuration as contested, sacred space in multiple traditions (including Judaism, Christianity, Islam, and others). The course will address how Jerusalem acquired its "holy" status on both a micro-level (via sacred spaces within the city) and macro-level (as a target for pilgrimage in competition with other cities in the region). These aspects of the city will be analyzed both as they are depicted in texts and as they are attested in the art and architecture found in Jerusalem and in similar cities in the broader Mediterranean/Middle East. The course will examine how sacred space and sacred urbanism are produced through interactions with texts, artifacts, and built environments.

Not Offered Every Year

Also Offered As: JWST 0014, MELC 0014, NELC 0014

Mutually Exclusive: MELC 6414

1 Course Unit

RELS 0300 Gurus, Prophets & Aliens: Understanding New Religious Movements

This course offers a thematic introduction to the history of New Religious Movements (NRM) from the mid-19th century to the present day. Often labeled as "cults" by the state and established religious institutions, new religions offer modern believers alternative spiritual and ideological solutions to age-old problems. In this class, students will be introduced to the teachings and practices of prominent NRMs in North America, Europe, Asia, and Australia, from wide-spread movements such as Scientology, Mormonism, and the Unification Church to lesser known groups such as the Church of the Almighty God, Neo-Paganism, and Raelism. We will explore the emergence of the anti-cult campaign in the second half of the 20th century, the relationship between apocalyptic sects such as the Peoples Temple and the Branch Davidians and political and social protest, and the role of Asian religions such as the Maharishi Mahesh Yogi's Transcendental Meditation in the development of New Age religiosity. In addition, we will learn how new religious movements such as Wicca and the Children of God helped reshape gender roles and changed mainstream views about sexuality, and how developments in mass media and popular culture contributed to the creation of new groups such as the Star Wars inspired Temple of the Jedi Order (Jediism), the Church of the Latter-Day Dude (Dudeism), as well as UFO religions such as Heaven's Gate. Throughout the semester, students will be exposed to a wide variety of primary and secondary sources, from academic articles and scholarly essays to documentaries, feature films, and TV shows. No previous knowledge in Religious Studies is required.

1 Course Unit

RELS 0301 Introduction to the Bible

An introduction to the major themes and ideas of the Hebrew Bible (the Old Testament), with attention to the contributions of archaeology and modern Biblical scholarship, including Biblical criticism and the response to it in Judaism and Christianity. All readings are in English.

Not Offered Every Year

Also Offered As: JWST 0303, MELC 0300, NELC 0300

1 Course Unit

RELS 0305 Great Books of Judaism

Since the early medieval period, Jews have been known as "the People of the Book". Yet the books they produced and consumed changed drastically over time and place, spanning a variety of known genres and inventing new ones. These works, in turn, shaped the texts, ideas, and lives of Jews and others for millennia, spawned vast commentary traditions, and inspired new works. This course engages prominent Jewish texts, such as the Hebrew Bible, Rabbinic Literature, the works of major medieval philosophers, pre-modern intellectuals, and modern authors, situating them in their literary, cultural, and social contexts, and examining their later reception.

Not Offered Every Year

Also Offered As: JWST 0305, MELC 0305, NELC 0305

Mutually Exclusive: MELC 5210

1 Course Unit

RELS 0310 Religion and Violence

Perhaps nothing haunts modern politics more than religious violence. Killing sprees done in the name of God reveal the limits of political power. What spaces left for the rule of law when appeals to dogma and the divine supersede reason? The causes and nature of divinely motivated violence are so mystifying that they are a constant topic of debate among academics, political parties, and news commentators. What really motivates religious violence? Is it just economic or class grievances in disguise? Are all religions prone to violence? Are some religions more violent than others? Or, are religions only violent when they go awry, denying their true messages? And does religion need to be quarantined and privatized, to keep us all safe? In this course, we'll probe the dividing line separating religion from politics in an effort to better understand the causes and nature of religious violence. How do we know the difference between religious violence and political violence? What makes religion violent, and what makes violence religious?

1 Course Unit

RELS 0315 Jewish Literature in the Middle Ages in Translation

Course explores the cultural history of Jews in the lands of Islam from the time of Mohammed through the late 17th century (end of Ottoman expansion into Europe) –in Iraq, the Middle East, al-Andalus and the Ottoman Empire. Primary source documents (in English translation) illuminate minority-majority relations, internal Jewish tensions (e.g., Qaraism), and developments in scriptural exegesis, rabbinic law, philosophy, poetry, polemics, mysticism and liturgy.

Not Offered Every Year

Also Offered As: COML 0315, JWST 0315, MELC 0315

1 Course Unit

RELS 0318 Abrahamic Faiths & Cultures: Create Community Course

The aim of this course is to design a Middle School curriculum on "Abrahamic Faiths and Cultures" that will subsequently be taught in local public schools. First two hours will be devoted to study and discussion of primary and secondary sources grouped in thematic units. These will explore Jewish, Christian and Islamic teachings on topics including God, worship, religious calendar, life cycle events, attitudes toward religious others; internal historical developments. During the last seminar hour, we will learn from West Philadelphia clergy members, Middle School Social Studies teachers and principals about what they regard as necessary, and incorporate their insights. During the last hour, West Philadelphia clergy members, Middle School Social Studies teachers and principals will share with us what they believe is needed to enable the course to succeed. Class participants will attend prayer services on fieldtrips to a range of West Philadelphia houses of worship. In future semesters, some class participants may teach the resulting curriculum in selected neighborhood schools.

Fall

Also Offered As: MELC 0318, URBS 0318

1 Course Unit

RELS 0325 Jewish Mysticism

Survey of expressions of Jewish mysticism from Hebrew Scripture through the 21st century. Topics include rabbinic concerns about mystical speculation, the ascent through the celestial chambers - heikhalot-, the Book of Creation, the relationship of Jewish philosophy and mysticism, techniques of letter permutation, schematization of the Divine Body, the prominence of gender and sexuality in kabbalistic thought, the relationship of kabbalah to the practice of the commandments, Zohar, Lurianic kabbalah, Hasidism, New-Age Jewish spirituality and the resurgence of Jewish mysticism in the 20th century. All readings will be in English translation.

Not Offered Every Year

Also Offered As: JWST 0325, MELC 0325

1 Course Unit

RELS 0330 Modern Catholic Christianity

At the turn of the twentieth century, Sigmund Freud hypothesized that religion was a dead duck. Many other thinkers of "modernity" have agreed with his thesis; and yet, over a century later, it is clear that religion is still a forceful presence in human culture. One religious tradition that has survived to the surprise (and even consternation) of some critics, is Roman Catholic Christianity. This first-year seminar will look closely at the Catholic Church in the twenty-first century, to explore the ways in which Catholicism has (and has not) adapted to modernity. We will begin with an investigation into the history of Roman Catholicism; how it is defined, and how it developed in relation to politics and culture in the Roman Empire, medieval and early modern Europe, and in the Americas; but most of the semester will focus on the Catholic Church of the past 200 years, especially as it appears in the United States. We will consider the relationship of Catholicism to many aspects of modern life, including science and technology, political systems and leaders, aesthetics (visual arts, music, literature and film), and understandings of gender and sexuality. There will be a mid-term examination and a final paper of 6 to 10 pages.

1 Course Unit

RELS 0335 Themes Jewish Tradition

Course topics will vary; they have included The Binding of Isaac, Responses to Catastrophes in Jewish History, Holy Men & Women (Ben-Amos); Rewriting the Bible (Dohrmann); Performing Judaism (Fishman); Jewish Political Thought (Fishman); Jewish Esotericism (Lorberbaum) Democratic culture assumes the democracy of knowledge - the accessibility of knowledge and its transparency. Should this always be the case? What of harmful knowledge? When are secrets necessary? In traditional Jewish thought, approaching the divine has often assumed an aura of danger. Theological knowledge was thought of as restricted. This seminar will explore the "open" and "closed" in theological knowledge, as presented in central texts of the rabbinic tradition: the Mishnah, Maimonides and the Kabbalah. Primary sources will be available in both Hebrew and English.

Not Offered Every Year

Also Offered As: JWST 0330, MELC 0330

Mutually Exclusive: MELC 6305

1 Course Unit

RELS 0361 First Year Seminar: Collecting and Collectors (SNF Paideia Program Course)

This first-year seminar examines theories and histories about the art, religion, psychology, ethics, economics, and politics of collecting. See the English Department's website at www.english.upenn.edu for a description of the current offerings.

Also Offered As: COML 0361, ENGL 0361

1 Course Unit

RELS 0500 East Asian Religions

This course will introduce students to the diverse beliefs, ideas, and practices of East Asia's major religious traditions: Buddhism, Confucianism, Daoism, Shinto, Popular Religion, as well as Asian forms of Islam and Christianity. As religious identity in East Asia is often fluid and non-sectarian in nature, these religious traditions will not be investigated in isolation. Instead, the course will adopt a chronological and geographical approach, examining the spread of religious ideas and practices across East Asia and the ensuing results of these encounters. The course will be divided into three units. Unit one will cover the religions of China. We will begin by discussing early Chinese religion and its role in shaping the imperial state before turning to the arrival of Buddhism and its impact in the development of organized Daoism, as well as local religion. In the second unit, we will turn eastward into Korea and Japan. After examining the impact of Confucianism and Buddhism on the religious histories of these two regions, we will proceed to learn about the formation of new schools of Buddhism, as well as the rituals and beliefs associated with Japanese Shinto and Korean Shamanism. The third and final unit will focus on the modern and contemporary periods through an analysis of key themes such as religion and modernity, the global reception and interpretation of East Asian religions, and the relationship between religion and popular culture. The class will be conducted mainly in the form of a lecture, but some sessions will be partially devoted to a discussion of primary sources in translation. The course assignments are designed to evaluate the development of both of these areas. No previous knowledge of East Asian languages is necessary, and all readings will be available in English on the Canvas site in PDF form.

Fall

Also Offered As: EALC 0500

1 Course Unit

RELS 0504 Introduction to the Qur'an

The goal of this course is to provide students with a general introduction to the holy scripture of the religion of Islam, the Qur'an. In particular, students will become familiar with various aspects of Qur'anic content and style, the significance of the Qur'an in Islamic tradition and religious practice, scholarly debates about the history of its text, and contemporary interpretations of it. Through close readings of a wide range of passages and short research assignments, students will gain first-hand knowledge of the Qur'an's treatment of prophecy, law, the Biblical tradition, and many other topics. No previous background in Islamic studies or Arabic language is required for this course.

Not Offered Every Year

Also Offered As: MELC 0500

1 Course Unit

RELS 0666 Satan: History, Poetics, and Politics of the Archenemy

This course explores the oldest and the most powerful antagonist of human history. Satan, the Devil, referred with many other names in different religious traditions, has a rich history from ancient dualist cosmologies, through the monotheistic traditions, up to the modern day. In this course, we will survey the many expressions of human creativity that underlies the emergence and development of this character. We will study mythology, scripture, philosophy, medicine, material culture, ritual practice, and iconographic representations to discover the many dimensions of the archenemy over the course of two millennia. Through an extensive study of Satan, we will see the ways in which people answered some perennial questions, such as: What is a human? How do we relate to the cosmos and nature? How do we make meaning of suffering? What is morality?

Fall or Spring

1 Course Unit

RELS 0690 Love and Hate

This course focuses on important constants of human life as they are grappled with across religious traditions. Drawing on data across a range of religious traditions (such as Christianity, Hinduism, Judaism, Islam, Buddhism and Mesoamerican Religion), we will explore topics such as sexual identity, politics, religion and the individual in contemporary life; and eroticism, sex and love as they are reflected in religious literature, art and history. Divine love and religious devotion will be examined in relation to acts of violence, including human sacrifice and self-sacrifice in the past as well as the present. Other important questions considered in this course include: how does the body function as the locus in which religion is enacted? What is the conflict between our agency over our bodies and socioreligious claims over individual autonomy? Is violence an integral part of religion? What are religious understandings of the relationship between our agency over our bodies and socioreligious claims over individual autonomy? Is violence an integral part of religion? What are religious understandings of the relationship between love and sex? What does it mean for human beings to love God?

Spring

Also Offered As: SAST 0690

1 Course Unit

RELS 0701 Medieval Road Trip: Reading and Writing with Chaucer

This Critical-Creative Seminar reads Chaucer's pathbreaking *The Canterbury Tales* to consider whether stories that entertain us can also make us better humans, how we should react when stories offend us; what power short stories have to challenge hierarchies and inequalities, and finally, how translating, adapting, and critiquing old stories can fashion communities of readers and writers across time. Students will have a chance to experiment with Chaucer's language and meter and ultimately contribute either a critical or a creative piece. See the English Department's website at www.english.upenn.edu for a description of current offerings

Also Offered As: COML 0701, ENGL 0701

1 Course Unit

RELS 0790 The Religion of Anime

Be it shrine maidens, gods of death, and bodhisattvas fighting for justice; apocalypse, the afterlife, and apotheosis... the popular Japanese illustrated media of manga and anime are replete with religious characters and religious ideas. This course uses popular illustrated media as a tool for tracing the long history of how media and religion have been deeply intertwined in Japan.

Fall

Also Offered As: CIMS 0790, EALC 1550

1 Course Unit

RELS 1010 Religion and Evolution

This class will explore encounters between religion and evolutionary sciences, from the 19th century to the present. We will consider the history of evolutionary biology's entanglements with faith, from the initial explosion of interest in the wake of Darwin's *Origin of the Species* in 1859 to contemporary debates about creationism and intelligent design here in Pennsylvania in the 21st century. In the first half of the class, we will look at how writers, philosophers, and theologians from around the world and a range of religious traditions have assessed the evolution-religion relationship — some seeing conflict, others concord. In the second half, we will consider evolutionary approaches to the origins of religion, from late-19th century accounts to modern cognitive science and group selection theories. Topics covered will include scientific racism, sociobiology and the evolutionary origins of morality, primate religion, and the relationship between science, religion, and politics.

Fall or Spring

1 Course Unit

RELS 1020 Sacred Stuff: Religious Bodies, Places, and Objects

Does religion start with what's in our heads? Or are religious commitments made, shaped and strengthened by the people, places, and things around us? This course will explore how religion happens in the material world. We'll start with classical and contemporary theories on the relationship of religion to stuff. We'll then consider examples of how religion is animated not just by texts, but through interactions with objects, spaces, bodies, monuments, color, design, architecture, and film. We'll ask how these material expressions of religion move beyond private faith and connect religion to politics and identity.

Fall or Spring

Also Offered As: ANTH 1120, ARTH 0339

1 Course Unit

RELS 1050 Virtual Religion: Religion in the Digital Age

How has religion responded and adapted to modern technology? How has the internet impacted our understanding of community, religion, morality, and embodiment? Can piety be digitized; can artificial intelligence be religious? In the new world in which we are discussing the advantages and perils of automatization, humans vs. robots, advanced medical practices, and the like, where does religion fit in? How to understand the discussions around virtual religious gatherings during the global pandemic? This course explores the ways in which religion is expressed and experienced through digital media around the globe. We will read literature on philosophy of technology, environment, and material aspects of religion. In light of such theoretical frameworks, we will analyze media that have been changing the paradigms of religious practice, such as the internet, digitization of texts and objects, 3-d printing, virtual reality experiments, artificial intelligence, and the recent global health crisis. The course will draw examples from a variety of religious traditions and will study various conversations taking place between religion and technology. We will give special attention to the on-going debates about virtual religion in connection to the Covid-19 pandemic, and will speak about the future of religious communities and practice.

Not Offered Every Year

1 Course Unit

RELS 1080 First Year Seminar - Black Spiritual Journeys: Modern African American

This first year seminar presents African Americans who have created religious and spiritual lives amid the variety of possibilities for religious belonging in the second half of the twentieth century and the early twenty-first century. By engaging an emerging canon of memoirs, we will take seriously the writings of Black spiritual gurus, theologians, hip hop philosophers, religious laity, activists, LGBTQ clergy, religious minorities, and scholars of religion as foundational for considering contemporary religious authority through popular and/or institutional forms of African American religious leadership. Themes of spiritual formation and religious belonging as a process—healing, self-making, writing, growing up, renouncing, dreaming, and liberating—characterize the religious journeys of the African American writers, thinkers, and leaders whose works we will examine. Each weekly session will also incorporate relevant audiovisual religious media, including online exhibits, documentary films, recorded sermons, tv series, performance art, and music.

Fall or Spring

Also Offered As: AFRC 0016

1 Course Unit

RELS 1100 American Jesus

Images and beliefs about Jesus have always been a compelling part of American life. This course seeks to examine the social, political, religious and artistic ways that Jesus has been appropriated and used in American life, making him a unique figure for exploring American religious life. Special attention will be given to how Jesus is used to shape social and political concerns, including race, gender, sexuality and culture.

Not Offered Every Year

Also Offered As: AFRC 1100

1 Course Unit

RELS 1105 Buddhist Arts of East Asia: Sources, Iconography and Styles

Survey of art and architecture created for Buddhist religious purposes in China, Japan, and to a lesser extent Korea, Tibet, and Central Asia. The course will include a brief overview of Buddhist monuments in South Asia, study of the iconography of Buddhist images in graphic and sculptural media, and analysis of a variety of Buddhist styles in painting, sculpture, and architecture.

Not Offered Every Year

Also Offered As: EALC 1105

1 Course Unit

RELS 1110 God and Money

The relationship between how people understand god(s) and money has always been a complicated one. Many religions have a relationship to money, whether in offerings, asking for blessings, or to build and create places worship. God and Money explores the relationship between how religions view money, capitalism, and religion, and how movements like the prosperity gospel have expanded and complicated the interplay between religion, money and capitalism around the world.

Fall or Spring

1 Course Unit

RELS 1112 Religion and Cinema in India

This seminar examines key themes in the study of religion and Indian cinema. The aim of the seminar is to foreground discussions of performativity, visual culture, representation, and politics in the study of modern South Asian religions. Themes include mythological cinema, gender and sexuality, censorship and the state, and communalism and secularism. The films we will be deploying as case studies will be limited to those produced in Hindi, Telugu and Tamil (the three largest cinema cultures of India). No knowledge of any South Asian language is needed for this course however.

Not Offered Every Year

Also Offered As: CIMS 1112, SAST 1112

1 Course Unit

RELS 1120 Religious Ethics and Modern Society

Religious beliefs of Malcolm X and MLK formed their social action during the Civil Rights for African Americans. This seminar will explore the religious biographies of each leader, how religion shaped their public and private personas, and the transformative and transgressive role that religion played in the history of the Civil Rights movement in the United States and abroad. Students in this course will leave with a clearer understanding of religious beliefs of Christianity, The Nation of Islam, and Islam, as well as religiously based social activism. Other course emphases include the public and private roles of religion within the context of the shaping of ideas of freedom, democracy, and equality in the United States, the role of the "Black church" in depicting messages of democracy and freedom, and religious oratory as exemplified through MLK and Malcolm X.

Fall or Spring

Also Offered As: AFRC 1120

1 Course Unit

RELS 1130 How to Read the Bible

The aim of this course is to explore what the Bible means, and why it means such different things to different people. Why do people find different kinds of meaning in the Bible. Who is right in the struggle over its meaning, and how does one go about deciphering that meaning in the first place? Focusing on the book of Genesis, this seminar seeks to help students answer these questions by introducing some of the many ways in which the Bible has been read over the ages. exploring its meaning as understood by ancient Jews and Christians, modern secular scholars, contemporary fiction writers, feminist activists, philosophers and other kinds of interpreter.

Also Offered As: JWST 1130, MELC 0365, NELC 0365

1 Course Unit

RELS 1140 Religion and Storytelling

This class will explore the way religion is represented in popular literature and film. Living in a largely secular world does not mean that interest in religion has waned. If anything, the opposite is true. Religion can be quietly embedded in a story or serve as the defining element of a narrative. We will investigate religious popular literature and media geared toward two separate audiences: secular and religious. Stories in the secular realm that explore religious communities often attempt to unveil the mysteries believed to exist among insular groups and challenge the dogmatism found in devout belief systems. Expats from religious communities who write their own accounts of leaving the values of their upbringing behind and the challenges of integrating themselves into a modern, secular world also contribute to the corpus of literature on the topic. Meanwhile, religious groups create their own form of entertainment that does not include the perceived vanities and traps of secular media, in the form of serialized fiction, novels, music, and film. What are the challenges with creating and consuming various depictions of religious life? What is our role as an audience in interpreting these narratives? How do the characteristics of popular literature and media affect how religion is represented? This class will explore how religion is represented and challenged in popular literature and media, focusing particularly on bestsellers—works that appeal to large numbers of people—to consider the implications of mainstream depictions. Alongside bestselling novels, self-help guides, short stories that appear in popular magazines, and acclaimed television shows, we will integrate theory from thinkers including Emile Durkheim, Clifford Geertz, Saba Mahmood, Beth Allison Barr, and Ayala Fader to guide our discussions.

Spring, even numbered years only

Also Offered As: COML 1141

1 Course Unit

RELS 1150 American Jewish Experience

This course offers a comprehensive survey of American Jewish history from the colonial period to the present. It will cover the different waves of Jewish immigration to the United States and examine the construction of Jewish political, cultural, and religious life in America. Topics will include: American Judaism, the Jewish labor movement, Jewish politics and popular culture, and the responses of American Jews to the Holocaust and the State of Israel.

Fall or Spring

Also Offered As: HIST 1150, JWST 1150

1 Course Unit

RELS 1170 African American Religion

The unique history and experiences of African Americans can be traced through religion and belief. Through the mediums of literature, politics, music, and film, students will explore the religious experience of people of the African Diaspora within the context of the complex history of race in American history. The course will cover a broad spectrum of African American religious experience including Black Nationalism, urban religions, the "black church" and African religious traditions such as Santería and Rastafarianism. Special attention will be paid to the role of race, gender, sexuality, and popular culture in the African American religious experience.

Fall or Spring

Also Offered As: AFRC 1117

1 Course Unit

RELS 1189 Islam and the West

How did Muslims and modern South Asia interact with the West? What Islamic idioms, orientations and movements emerged in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries? Was South Asia a prominent global center of Islam? What kinds of Islamic educational institutions developed in modern South Asia? How did Muslims appropriate technologies? What materials were printed by Muslims? Were Muslims part of the British army? What was jihad in modernity? How did Muslim 'modernists' and 'traditionalists' respond to the challenges of colonialism and modernity? What was the nature of Sufism in modern South Asia? What was the nature of political Islam in South Asia? How did some Muslims demand a Muslim State? What was the Partition? How has Muslim history been remembered in Bangladesh, India and Pakistan? This is an introductory course, and aims to introduce students to a facet of the long history of Islam, Muslims, and the West.

Not Offered Every Year

Also Offered As: SAST 1189

1 Course Unit

RELS 1200 The Bible in Translation

This course introduces students to one specific Book of the Hebrew Bible. "The Bible in Translation" involves an in-depth reading of a biblical source against the background of contemporary scholarship. Depending on the book under discussion, this may also involve a contextual reading with other biblical books and the textual sources of the ancient Near East. Although no prerequisites are required, this class is a perfect follow-up course to "Intro to the Bible."

Not Offered Every Year

Also Offered As: JWST 1200, MELC 1200, NELC 1200

1 Course Unit

RELS 1259 Ultimate Meanings

Does life have some ultimate meaning? In their search for an answer to this question, people tell stories—stories about the creation of the world, about great human beings confronted with the mysteries of existence, about what happens to people after death. To explore the role of stories in finding meaning in life, we will focus on some of the most meaningful stories ever composed: the biblical stories of Adam and Eve, Abraham and his family, the Exodus, Job and his friends, and the life and death of Jesus. One of our goals is to try to retrieve the original meaning of these narratives, what their authors intended, but we will also explore what they have come to mean for readers in our own day for believers and skeptics, scientists and artists, fundamentalists and feminists.

1 Course Unit

RELS 1270 Gender and Religion in Israel

Contemporary Israel is a site not just of religious conflict but of clashing gender norms, bringing together a variety of groups - the secular and the religious, the Orthodox and the non-Orthodox - that are distinguished from each other in part by their understanding of gender and their treatment of women and LGBTQ people. As a way into understanding the interaction of religion and gender more broadly, this course surveys various intersections of religion, gender and politics in Israel today, investigating how religion shapes gender relations, and is shaped in turn by gender.

Also Offered As: JWST 1270

1 Course Unit

RELS 1271 Israel: Law, Religion and State

This course aims to explore the role of religion in the political and legal culture of the state of Israel by examining Israel's efforts and vision to be both a Jewish state and a democratic state at the same time. How does the state of Israel manage the challenges and conflicts inherent in such an identity, and what is there to be learned about the relationship between the state and religion by comparing the situation in Israel with the separation of Church and State in the United States? What is the status of gender equity in Israel when it is in apparent conflict with religious considerations? Religious freedom and the rights of people belonging to other religious groups? Students will have the opportunity to learn more about these and other questions as the course examines the political, legal and cultural foundations of Israel's self-identity as a Jewish and democratic state.

Not Offered Every Year

Also Offered As: JWST 1272

1 Course Unit

RELS 1280 Spirituality in Contemporary Israel

This course maps out spiritual and religious life in Israel today, ranging from state-supported orthodox communities to groups that practice alternative forms of spirituality. What role do tradition, custom and ritual practice play in the construction of contemporary Israeli identity? How does the State shape religious and spiritual life? What forms of spiritual life are emerging beyond orthodoxy? The course will explore these and other questions through the examination of various media including newspapers, movies, and online conversations with Israeli religious leaders and important figures in popular culture.

Fall, even numbered years only

Also Offered As: JWST 1280

1 Course Unit

RELS 1320 The History of God

This course introduces the history of God as understood by modern scholars of religion. Why do people believe in gods in the first place? How is the God of the Old Testament different from earlier Near Eastern deities, or different from God as represented in the New Testament and the Quran? When and why did people come to question the existence of God, and how has the idea of God changed in the last century in light of experiences like the Holocaust, social movements like feminism, and the rise of new technologies like the Internet? This course will address these questions as it surveys the approaches scholars have developed to comprehend the history of a being who would seem beyond human comprehension.

Not Offered Every Year

Also Offered As: ANCH 1204, JWST 1320

1 Course Unit

RELS 1350 Introduction to the New Testament

What can be known - from historical perspectives - about the life and teachings of Jesus and his earliest followers? Did Jesus see himself as a teacher and/or a revolutionary and/or the messiah? If Jesus and the apostles were all Jews, how did Christianity emerge as a distinct "religion"? distinct from Judaism? And how is that this small Galilean and Judean movement came to shape world history and Western culture even to this day? This course explores these questions through a focus on the formation of the New Testament - from the letters of Paul in the early first century CE, to the collection and closure of the canon of Christian Scriptures in the fourth century CE. In the process, we will explore the lived worlds of the first followers of Jesus through readings of texts within and outside the New Testament but also through art, artifacts, and manuscripts at Penn and in Philadelphia.

Fall or Spring

1 Course Unit

RELS 1360 Death and the Afterlife in Ancient Judaism and Christianity

This course surveys the development of concepts about death and the afterlife in Judaism and Christianity, exploring the cultural and socio-historical contexts of the formation of beliefs about heaven and hell, the end of the world, martyrdom, immortality, resurrection, and the problem of evil. Readings cover a broad range of ancient sources, including selections from the Hebrew Bible and New Testament, as well as other Jewish and Christian writings (e.g., "apocrypha," "pseudepigrapha," Dead Sea Scrolls, classical rabbinic literature, Church Fathers, "gnostic" and "magical" materials). In the process, this course introduces students to formative eras and ideas in the history of Judaism, Christianity, and Western culture.

Fall or Spring

Also Offered As: JWST 1360

1 Course Unit

RELS 1370 Religion and the Global Future (SNF Paideia Program Course)

What role is religion playing in shaping the future of the globe? Has it made the world more or less dangerous? Can it help humanity address challenges like international conflict, climate change and poverty, or is it making those problems worse? The goal of this course is to help students think through these questions in light of the scholarship on religion and its intersections with international relations and public policy.

Spring

1 Course Unit

RELS 1400 The Making of Scripture

The Bible as we know it is the product of a lengthy process of development, elaboration, contest, and debate. Rather than a foregone conclusion, the process by which the texts and traditions within the bible, and the status ascribed to them, was turbulent and uncertain. This course examines that process, examining the Bible, traditions and communities from the Second Temple Period - such as the Dead Sea Scrolls and Community - that rewrote, reconsidered, revised, or rejected now well-recognized figures and stories, and constructed distinct ideas of what was considered scripture and how it should be approached. Even as the bible began to resemble the corpus as we now know it, interpretive strategies rendered it entirely different, such as Hellenistic Allegorizers, working from the platonic tradition, rabbinic readers who had an entirely different set of hermeneutics, early Christians, who offered different strategies for reading the "Old" and "New" Testaments alongside one another (and employing categories like "Old" and "New," themselves constituting a new attitude and relationship to and between these texts), and lastly early Muslim readers, who embraced many of the stories in the Bible, altered others, and debated the status of these corpuses under Islam.

Not Offered Every Year

Also Offered As: JWST 1400, MELC 1400, NELC 1400

1 Course Unit

RELS 1430 Introduction to Islam

This course is an introduction to Islam as a religion as it exists in societies of the past as well as the present. It explores the many ways in which Muslims have interpreted and put into practice the prophetic message of Muhammad through historical and social analyses of varying theological, philosophical, legal, political, mystical and literary writings, as well as through visual art and music. The aim of the course is to develop a framework for explaining the sources and symbols through which specific experiences and understandings have been signified as Islamic, both by Muslims and by other peoples with whom they have come into contact, with particular emphasis given to issues of gender, religious violence and changes in beliefs and behaviors which have special relevance for contemporary society.

Fall or Spring

Also Offered As: MELC 0550, NELC 0550, SAST 1430

1 Course Unit

RELS 1440 From Jesus to Muhammad: History of Early Christianity

"Jesus and Muhammad walk into a bar..." We can think about multiple ways to complete the joke. They could talk about prophecy and prophetic succession, God's word, women, pagans and Jews, state authority, among others. This course traces the long arc of religious history, from the Jesus movement to the rise of Islam. Through texts, objects, buildings, and artistic representations we will study the time period that connects these two significant developments that majorly changed world history. Lectures and discussions will consist of close reading, analysis, and discussion of primary sources, analysis of non-literary media, and engagement with modern scholarship. We will raise questions about ancient and modern perspectives on religious practice, representation, authority, gender, race/ethnicity, memory, and interreligious encounters.

Not Offered Every Year

1 Course Unit

RELS 1520 What is Taoism?

This course introduces a wide variety of ideas and practices that have at one time or another been labeled as Daoist (or "Taoist" in the Wade-Giles Romanization), in order to sort out the different senses of the term, and consider whether these ideas and practices have had any common features. We will begin with the two most famous Daoist works—the Zhuangzi and the Daodejing (or Laozi). We will also survey other bio-spiritual practices, such as the meditational techniques of Inner Alchemy and the self-cultivation regimens known today as Qigong and Tai-chi, as well as the theological and ritual foundations of organized Daoist lineages, many of which are still alive across East Asia. We will conclude with a critical review of the twentieth-century reinvention of "Daoism," the scientization of Inner Alchemy, and the new classification of "religious" versus "philosophical Daoism." While familiarizing ourselves with the key concepts, practices, and organizations developed in the history of Daoism, this course emphasizes the specific socio-political context of each of them. Throughout the course, we will think critically about the label of "Daoist" (as well as "Confucian" and "Buddhist") in Chinese history and in modern scholarship. We will also question modern demarcations between the fields of philosophy, religion, and science.

Not Offered Every Year

Also Offered As: EALC 1520

1 Course Unit

RELS 1600 Jews and Judaism in Antiquity

A broad introduction to the history of Jewish civilization from its Biblical beginnings to the Middle Ages, with the main focus on the formative period of classical rabbinic Judaism and on the symbiotic relationship between Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.

Spring

Also Offered As: HIST 1600, JWST 1600, MELC 0350, NELC 0350

1 Course Unit

RELS 1605 Muslims, Christians, and Jews in the Middle East: Historical Perspectives

A reading- and discussion-intensive seminar that addresses several recurring questions with regard to the Middle East and North Africa. How have Islam, Judaism, and Christianity influenced each other in these regions historically? How have Jews, Christians, and Muslims fared as religious minorities? To what extent have communal relations been characterized by harmony and cooperation, or by strife and discord, and how have these relations changed in different contexts over time? To what extent and under what circumstances have members of these communities converted, intermarried, formed business alliances, and adopted or developed similar customs? How has the emergence of the modern nation-state system affected communal relations as well as the legal or social status of religious minorities in particular countries? How important has religion been as one variable in social identity (along with sect, ethnicity, class, gender, etc.), and to what extent has religious identity figured into regional conflicts and wars? The focus of the class will be on the modern period (c. 1800-present) although we will read about some relevant trends in the early and middle Islamic periods as well. Students will also pursue individually tailored research to produce final papers. Prior background in Islamic studies and Middle Eastern history is required. Middle Eastern history is required.

Not Offered Every Year

Also Offered As: HIST 0836, JWST 1605, MELC 1605, NELC 1605

Mutually Exclusive: MELC 6605

1 Course Unit

RELS 1610 Medieval and Early Modern Jewry

Exploration of intellectual, social, and cultural developments in Jewish civilization from the rise of Islam in the seventh century to the assault on established conceptions of faith and religious authority in 17th century Europe, that is, from the age of Mohammed to that of Spinoza. Particular attention will be paid to the interaction of Jewish culture with those of Christianity and Islam.

Fall

Also Offered As: HIST 1610, JWST 1610, MELC 0355, NELC 0355

1 Course Unit

RELS 1640 Devotion's New Market: Religion, Economics, and the City

This graduate and undergraduate level course introduces students to the new forms of devotion as circulated in various urban centers in South Asia with a focus on growing market economy and urbanization. This course will particularly discuss case studies of how different modes of Hinduism, Islam, Christianity and other minor religions operate in an urbanized middle-class and educated communities. We will read theoretical and ethnographical works of contemporary research in religious studies and anthropology that deal with the questions of modernity, reformism and economic developmentalism. Throughout the semester, we focus on 1) how does religious forms such as sainthood practices, private and public rituals, narrative modes and everyday life evolve in the background of growing politics of development; 2) we discuss the tensions between classical notions of devotion and their new transformations in the city life, and finally 3) theoretically, we analyze concepts such as reformism, fundamentalism, recent discourses on identity politics and gender implications as connected to urban religious life.

Not Offered Every Year

Also Offered As: ANTH 1171, SAST 1171

Mutually Exclusive: SAST 5571

1 Course Unit

RELS 1690 Modern Jewish Intellectual and Cultural History

An overview of Jewish intellectual and cultural history from the late 18th century until the present. The course considers the Jewish enlightenment Reform, Conservative and Neo-Orthodox Judaism, Zionist and Jewish Socialist thought, and Jewish thought in the 20th century, particularly in the context of the Holocaust. Readings of primary sources including Mendelsohn, Geiger, Hirsch, Herzl, Achad-ha-Am, Baeck, Buber, Kaplan, and others. No previous background is required.

Fall or Spring

Also Offered As: HIST 1690, JWST 1690

1 Course Unit

RELS 1710 Jews in the Modern World

This course offers an intensive survey of the major currents in Jewish culture and society from the late middle ages to the present. Focusing upon the different societies in which Jews have lived, the course explores Jewish responses to the political, socio-economic, and cultural challenges of modernity. Topics to be covered include the political emancipation of Jews, the creation of new religious movements within Judaism, Jewish socialism, antisemitism, Zionism, the Holocaust, and the emergence of new Jewish communities in Israel and the United States. No prior background in Jewish history is expected.

Spring

Also Offered As: HIST 1710, JWST 1710, MELC 0360, NELC 0360

1 Course Unit

RELS 1730 Introduction to Buddhism

This course seeks to introduce students to the diversity of doctrines held and practices performed by Buddhists in Asia. By focusing on how specific beliefs and practices are tied to particular locations and particular times, we will be able to explore in detail the religious institutions, artistic, architectural, and musical traditions, textual production and legal and doctrinal developments of Buddhism over time and within its socio-historical context. Religion is never divorced from its place and its time. Furthermore, by geographically and historically grounding the study of these religions we will be able to examine how their individual ethic, cosmological and soteriological systems effect local history, economics, politics, and material culture. We will concentrate first on the person of the Buddha, his many biographies and how he has been followed and worshipped in a variety of ways from Lhasa, Tibet to Phrae, Thailand. From there we touch on the foundational teachings of the Buddha with an eye to how they have evolved and transformed over time. Finally, we focus on the practice of Buddhist ritual, magic and ethics in monasteries and among aly communities in Asia and even in the West. This section will confront the way Buddhists have thought of issues such as "Just-War," Women's Rights and Abortion. While no one quarter course could provide a detailed presentation of the beliefs and practices of Buddhism, my hope is that we will be able to look closely at certain aspects of these religions by focusing on how they are practiced in places like Nara, Japan or Vietnam, Laos.

Fall or Spring

Also Offered As: EALC 0501, SAST 1730

1 Course Unit

RELS 1800 Sacred Stuff: Religious Bodies, Places, and Objects

Does religion start with what's in our heads? Or are religious commitments made, shaped and strengthened by the people, places, and things around us? This course will explore how religion happens in the material world. We'll start with classical and contemporary theories on the relationship of religion to stuff. We'll then consider examples of how religion is animated not just by texts, but through interactions with objects, spaces, bodies, monuments, color, design, architecture, and film. We'll ask how these material expressions of religion move beyond private faith and connect religion to politics and identity.

Fall or Spring

Also Offered As: ANTH 1803

1 Course Unit

RELS 1999 Independent Study

Students arrange with a faculty member to pursue a program of reading and writing on a suitable topic.

Fall or Spring

1 Course Unit

RELS 2014 Medieval Literature Seminar: Premodern Animals

This course introduces students to critical animal studies via medieval literature and culture. See the English Department's website at www.english.upenn.edu for a description of the current offerings.

Also Offered As: COML 2014, ENGL 2014

1 Course Unit

RELS 2040 Ancient Iranian Empires

Iran - as a landmass and a political entity - was central to the ancient world in a variety of ways. Ancient Iranian Empires were of central importance to - and centrally located in - the ancient world. It was the successor kingdom to the Assyrians and Babylonians; the power against which Greece and Rome defined themselves; and the crucible in which various communities and models of rule developed. This course offers a survey of the history of the ancient Persianate world, focusing in particular on the political and imperial entities that rose to power, the cultural, political, mercantile, and other contacts they shared with their neighbors to the East and West, and the communities and religious groups that arose and flourished within their lands. Ancient Iranian empires rivaled the Greek and Roman Empires to their West, and the central and eastern Asian Empires to their east, and the ongoing history of diplomacy, cultural contact, and war between these regions was formative to each and to the ancient world as a whole. Iran was home to and similarly formative for a variety of religions, including Zoroastrianism, Judaism, Christianity, Manichaeism, and Islam, and a central question Ancient Iranian political powers sought to address was how to negotiate and address the variety of populations under their control. The course will conclude by studying how, rather than a simplistic story of decline, the strategies, policies, institutions, and memory of the Iranian Empires continued to shape early Islam, medieval imagination, and modern political regimes.

Not Offered Every Year

Also Offered As: ANCH 1103, MELC 2040, NELC 2040

1 Course Unit

RELS 2070 Jews, Race and Religion

Contemporary Jewish identity exists at an uneasy cross-section of race, religion and ethnicity. This course aims to expose students to the diversity of Jewish experience through the lenses of race and religion, examining the various ways these categories intersect and complicate each other. How can the study of race and religion help us to understand the present and future of Jewish life? How do Jews figure in the study of race and race relations in North America and Israel? Of what relevance is the category of whiteness for understanding Jewish identity, and what does their association in the U.S. mask about Jews and Jewish life today? And what are the roles of Jews in the continuing struggle for racial justice now underway in the world? This course aims to address these questions in light of a range of intellectual perspectives and disciplinary approaches. It will be built around a series of weekly guest lectures by leading scholars of Jews, race and/or religion, and will include among the questions and topics that it explores opportunities to explore connections among scholarship, personal experience and activism.

Not Offered Every Year

Also Offered As: JWST 2070

1 Course Unit

RELS 2071 Anti-Semitism, Islamophobia, and Racism in Contemporary Times

In a world saturated with competing narratives about anti-Semitism and Islamophobia, it can be hard to sort through the mess. Often, it's difficult to even understand what we're talking about. Where do these forms of discrimination come from? Are they about race? Religion? Ethnicity? Perhaps something else entirely? In this course, we'll address these questions using a variety of disciplines and by looking at a range of sources, from literature and films to works of philosophy and political theory. We'll turn our attention back to medieval Spain and move all the way through contemporary debates about the Holocaust, the State of Israel, and the War on Terror. By the end, students will have a rich knowledge of the various forms these ideas have taken, how and why they are intrinsically related to one another, and how they have evolved in the present. If you're interested in understanding more about our current world and how it came to be, this class will build a strong foundation for engaging in historically informed critical dialogue on today's pressing social issues.

Spring, even numbered years only

Also Offered As: JWST 2071

1 Course Unit

RELS 2110 Religion and Ecology

This class will introduce the overlaps between religion and ecology. Rather than assuming that there is a necessary positive or negative relationship between religion and ecology, we will look at how these relationships have materialized in complicated ways at different moments in history. We'll consider perspectives and case studies from a range of different moments in history. We'll consider perspectives and case studies from a range of different traditions, with a special attention paid to the genesis of the field of Religion and Ecology in critiques of Christian attitudes toward the environment in the 1960s and 1970s.

Not Offered Every Year

Also Offered As: ANTH 2110, ENVS 2410

1 Course Unit

RELS 2120 Animals and Religion

Religion is full of animals—lions and lambs, monkeys and elephants, buffalo and snakes, even mythical beasts. The identity of the human being is explained, in many traditions, by contrast with the identity of other species. We know who we are because we know who they are, or do we? This course interrogates—through an exploration of sacred texts, art, film, and museum artifacts—the tension present in many traditions between an anthropocentric prioritization of the human being and religious resources that encourage a valuing of other animal species. We'll explore the way animals function both as religious objects and as religious subjects across diverse traditions, asking how human-animal relationships have shaped religion and how religion has shaped the way we think about and interact with other animals. We'll ask how religion has engaged with animals over time and across global cultures, understanding them as symbols, messengers, and manifestations of the divine; as material for ritual and sacrifice; as kin and subordinates; as food and as filth; as helpmeets and as tempters. How have these perspectives shaped animal ethics, influencing the treatment, use, and consumption of animals and their bodies? Finally, we'll ask what it means that we ourselves are evolved animals. How does our own animality factor into the practice of human religion? Is our religious capacity part of what sets us apart from other animals or is religiosity a trait we might expect to find in other species? To what extent is religion a function of the animal?

Not Offered Every Year

Also Offered As: ANTH 2120, ENVS 2420

1 Course Unit

RELS 2180 Media and Culture in Contemporary Iran

This course offers a comprehensive introduction to the culture and media of modern Iran, with a critical perspective on issues such as identity formation, ethnicity, race, and nation-building. It focuses on how these issues relate to various aspects of modern Iranian culture – such as religion, gender, sexuality, war, and migration – through the lens of media, cinema, and literature.

Not Offered Every Year

Also Offered As: CIMS 2705, GSWS 2705, MELC 2705, NELC 2705

1 Course Unit

RELS 2250 History of Hinduism

This course will explore the history of the religion(s) designated by the term 'Hinduism' from their earliest articulations down to the rise of modern reforms in the nineteenth century. The study of Hinduism is perhaps unique among the scholarly traditions on world religions in that it has to date had no serious connected account of its historical development, as scholars have preferred to take structural, sociological, phenomenological, and doctrinal approaches to the religion. The course, after a brief review of scholarly approaches to Hinduism and their interpretive legacies, will seek to develop a historical sense of the religion through attention to shifts in liturgy, ritual, theology, doctrine, sacral kingship, and soteriology. The course will include the reading of primary sources relevant to understanding these changes as well as highlight both modern and premodern traditions of their interpretation. It will also consider and assess some of the key interpretive ideas in the study of Hinduism, including, Sanskritization, Great and Little Traditions, cult formation, regional and popular religious movements, and canon formation. There will also be sustained consideration of the question of religion and socio-political power as well as relations between Hinduism and other religions like Buddhism and Islam.

Not Offered Every Year

Also Offered As: SAST 2250

1 Course Unit

RELS 2270 Queer and Religious in Israel

This course explores intersections of gender and religion among Jewish LGBTQ+ people in contemporary Israel. Using case studies, the course investigates the struggle for recognition, the creation of new ritual practices, and other dimensions of religious LGBTQ+ experience, both within Israel and in comparison to the United States. The course is offered at an introductory level and is meant for all students interested in the way gender and religion combine in the formation of identity.

Not Offered Every Year

1 Course Unit

RELS 2350 Eastern Christianities

The history of Christianity is often told from the perspective of its spread westward from Israel to Rome. Yet, in the first millennium, there were more Christians living in the East, in places as far away as Persia, Yemen, India, China, and Mongolia, than in the West. Spread across the Asian continent, these Christians were actively involved in local and imperial politics, composed theological literature, and were deeply embedded in the cultural fabric of their host societies. This course traces the spread of Christianity eastward, paying particular attention to its regional developments, its negotiations with local political powers, and its contact with other religions, including Buddhism, Manichaeism, and Islam. Readings will cover a broad range of sources, including selections from classical Syriac literature, Manichaean texts, Mesopotamian magic bowls, the so-called "Jesus Sutras," and the Quran. All readings will be provided in English, and no background is presumed.

Not Offered Every Year

Also Offered As: MELC 3260, NELC 3260, SAST 2350

1 Course Unit

RELS 2390 Death, Disease & Demons in the Medieval World

How did life end for people in the medieval world? For most, death was not considered an end point because the soul journeyed on after the end of the body. But to where did it journey? And how would it be reunited with the body in the future? Between the classical period and the High Middle Ages, death shifted from a moment of quiet release to a frightening struggle in which angels and demons lay in wait for a soul as soon as it exited the body. This course will examine these changing beliefs about dying, focusing primarily on Christian medieval Europe but drawing comparative examples from Judaism, the Roman world, and Byzantine Christianity. Other topics we'll consider include martyrdom and fears of bodily dismemberment; the emergence of purgatory and depictions of the afterworld; and the development of Christian rites for the dead. We'll also investigate beliefs about the invisible powers of demons and the apocalyptic end of times. The course will also explore not only the process by which people entered the afterlife in the Middle Ages but also the causes of their deaths—what kinds of disease primarily afflicted medieval society, and how did age, class and gender intersect with disease to affect certain populations? We will end the semester by examining that most apocalyptic of Medieval events—the Black Death—in light of recent scientific discoveries, medieval medical explanations, and social changes brought on by this demographic catastrophe. Students will be exposed to a range of primary sources as well as evidence from tombstone inscriptions, architecture and manuscript illuminations, and archaeology. No prior knowledge of Medieval history is necessary.

Not Offered Every Year

1 Course Unit

RELS 2440 From Miracles to Mindfulness

In 1902, the most famous philosopher in America, William James, revolutionized the study of religion by analyzing religion as an experience rather than as a set of doctrines or scriptures. In this course, we will pick up the inquiry that James and scholars such as Sigmund Freud began by exploring new approaches to the science and philosophy of religious experience. We will invite a series of experts from a wide range of fields: neuroscience, psychoanalysis, phenomenology, psychology, anthropology, to name only a few to present their cutting-edged research on the nature of religious experience. How can religious experience be studied? What does the research reveal about religious experience? And what can we learn from such experiences about the workings of the human mind and human society? The course has two components: 1) a discussion-centered mini-seminar from 3:30-5:00 will open consideration of the subject with help from relevant readings 2) a guest lecture series every Tuesday from 5:00-6:30, featuring leading scholars who approach religious experience from different disciplinary angles or in light of different questions.

Also Offered As: JWST 2440

1 Course Unit

RELS 2450 Sufism

This course is a survey of the large complex of Islamic intellectual and social perspectives subsumed under the term Sufism." Sufi philosophies, beliefs, practices, and social organizations have been a major part of the Islamic tradition in all historical periods and Sufism has also served as a primary muse behind Islamic aesthetic expression in poetry, music, and the visual arts. In this course, we will attempt to understand the nature and importance of Sufism by addressing both the world of ideas and socio-cultural practices. We will trace the development of Sufism as a form of Muslim piety linked to key notions in the Quran as well as living practices of venerating the Prophet Muhammad. We will then immerse ourselves in Sufi theoretical writings through a select list of primary sources introducing foundational Sufi concepts concerning the annihilation of oneself in God, and the various stages of the Sufi quest for spiritual union. From there, we will shift to a discussion of the interactions between Sufism and philosophy by looking at the writings of two of the most influential Sufi thinkers, Al-Ghazali and Ibn al-Arabi. We will also study the important role of Sufi poetry through a close reading of a selection of Rumi's works. In our discussion of the social and political dimensions of Sufism, we will explore the relations between Sufi movements and religious and political authority, focusing on antinomianism and patronage in the Ottoman Empire, and on Sufi responses to colonial rule. The last part of the course will look at the roles of Sufis and Sufism in contemporary societies from South Asia to North America.

Spring

1 Course Unit

RELS 2460 Spirituality in the Age of Global Warming: Designing a Digital Mapping Project in Scalar

We are living in the midst of one of the most severe crises in the Earth's history. Science confirms the glaciers are melting, hurricanes are growing more intense, and the oceans are rising. But there is also a deeply spiritual dimension to global warming that does not factor into the scientific explanations of the Anthropocene. "Spirituality" will be defined not in terms of one particular religion, but in relationship to a passionate study of the environment and nature. Readings will include materials from both the sciences and the humanities such as Donella Meadows's *Thinking in Systems*, Elizabeth Kolbert's *The Sixth Extinction*, Barbara Kingsolver's *Flight Behavior*, and films such as *Black Fish* and *Wale Rider*. The theoretical focus of the course will be how "multispecies partnerships" can help us better understand and mitigate the effects of Climate Change. This class will work collaboratively on a digital archive with an interactive mapping interface designed in Scalar. This newly developed platform allows for the creation of multimedia exhibits that will document how Global Warming is affecting coral reefs in the tropics, glaciers in the Arctic and Antarctic, rainforests in the Amazon and rivers of Philadelphia. Students will also work individually to design interactive maps on the Scalar platform documenting their own more personal interactions with the environment.

Not Offered Every Year

Also Offered As: ENGL 1599, ENVS 2430

1 Course Unit

RELS 2531 Religion in Modern China

This course focuses on the history and role of religion in the Chinese cultural sphere (Mainland China, Taiwan, and the Diaspora) from the mid-19th century to the present day, focusing on the relationship between religious institutions and the state during the imperial, republican, and communist regimes. We will learn about the impact of religious ideas, practices, and organizations on social, political and economic processes and inspect the role of religion in the consolidation of individual, communal, and national identity. Adopting a comparative and interdisciplinary approach, we will attempt to ascertain the impact of the various Chinese religious traditions: Confucianism, Daoism, Buddhism, and popular sects, as well as global religions such as Islam and Christianity, on the internal sociopolitical structure of the Chinese state and their role in shaping power relations on a transregional, national, and local level. Special emphasis will be given to the role and use of the grand narratives of secularism and modernity in the shaping of the Chinese nation-state, as well as the value of using these frameworks in the study of modern China. The class is discussion based, supplemented by lectures, student presentations, and documentary films. No knowledge of Chinese is presumed. All readings will be in English.

Not Offered Every Year

Also Offered As: EALC 2531

1 Course Unit

RELS 2540 Violence, Tolerance, Freedom

This seminar examines how the adjective "religious" has been used to modify the nouns "violence," "tolerance," and "freedom." It traces the historical development of liberal ideas of tolerance and human rights, interrogates the common assumption that religion exerts a perverse influence on politics and vice versa, critically examines the concept of terrorism, and connects the neoliberal ideal of unfettered free markets to the idea of being "spiritual but not religious."

Spring

Also Offered As: ANTH 2540

1 Course Unit

RELS 2550 Media and Religion in South Asia

This course will look at the ways that religion intersects with media in South Asia—exploring how the medium is the message. The class begins with a discussion of how it is difficult to define "religion" and "media" in the Global South, specifically in South Asia. We will analyze how religion and media are inextricable, and also how news media has gone about the business of turning religion into news. The class will familiarize students with a variety of media forms aside from the obvious sources of internet, TV and newspaper—these include traditional architecture, devotional texts, devotional poetry, music, visual-sensorial worship, modern film, recorded music, clothing, and live performance. We will conclude with a look at religion in forms of contemporary media, with particular attention to new media (TV, radio, internet). The course also offers students lectures providing a foundation of knowledge on a few of the primary religious traditions that will be central to the regions under discussion: Islam, Hinduism, Sikhism, Jainism, Zoroastrianism, and Christianity. There will be guest speakers and a visit to Penn Museum. While much of the course will be immersed in the history and the past, we will conclude by considering contemporary contexts, both globalized and local. There is no prerequisite for the course. All students are welcome.

Fall

Also Offered As: SAST 2551

1 Course Unit

RELS 2560 Existential Despair

This is an experimental course that seeks to combine creative pedagogical methods and alternative scheduling to encourage intellectual reflection and emotional vulnerability through an in depth study of the way people cope with existential despair. Through a reading of memoirs, novels, poetry, and essays in an atmosphere conducive to close-reading and full-participation students will explore a wide-range of ways of coping with, describing, and comprehending moments of great despair. Lectures will explain the ritual, liturgical, homiletic, meditative, reflective, self-destructive, psycho-somatic, and ascetic ways despair is both conditioned and mitigated by different thinkers from various traditions over time. Format: This course is different from most others in that there is no homework, no outside reading, and no research papers. There will be no work given to students or expected of them outside of class. All work is done in class and class is very long (8 hours straight, once a week, from four PM to midnight). Students will eat together in class, there will be three bathroom breaks, but there will be no internet, no phones, no computers, and no auditors. Each student must be fully committed to the class and 75% of the grade will be determined by class participation.

1 Course Unit

RELS 2710 The Politics of Shinto

Shinto-derived images and ideas frequently appear in Japanese anime and film, and journalists and academics frequently mobilize the term Shinto as a way of explaining Japan's past or envisioning its future. The environmentalist left champions a green Shinto while Shinto-derived ideas serve as red meat for politicians pandering to Japan's nationalist right. While the influential position Shinto occupies in Japanese sociopolitical life is therefore clear, the term Shinto itself is actually not. Depending on who one asks, Shinto is either the venerable indigenous religion of the Japanese archipelago, the irreducible core of Japanese culture, a tiny subset of Japanese Buddhism, an environmentalist ethic, or some combination of these. This course investigates the multifarious types of Shinto envisioned by these competing interest groups.

Spring

Also Offered As: EALC 2550

Mutually Exclusive: RELS 6710

1 Course Unit

RELS 2730 Buddhist Literature

This course seeks to introduce students to the diversity of texts, textual practices, and textual communities in Buddhist Asia. We will look at cosmological, historical, narrative, psychological, grammatical, magical, didactic, and astrological genres to gain an understanding of how Buddhist writers from various places and times have expressed their views on the inner workings of the mind, the nature of action, the illusion of phenomena, the role of the ethical agent, the origin of chaos, the persistence of violence, the contours of the universe, and the way to Enlightenment.

Also Offered As: EALC 2501

1 Course Unit

RELS 2870 Religion and Society in Africa

In recent decades, many African countries have perennially ranked very high among the most religious. This course serves as an introduction to major forms of religiosity in sub-Saharan Africa. Emphasis will be devoted to the indigenous religious traditions, Christianity and Islam, as they are practiced on the continent. We will examine how these religious traditions intersect with various aspects of life on the continent. The aim of this class is to help students to better understand various aspects of African cultures by dismantling stereotypes and assumptions that have long characterized the study of religions in Africa. The readings and lectures are will be drawn from historical and a few anthropological, and literary sources.

Also Offered As: AFRC 2870, HIST 0837

1 Course Unit

RELS 3099 Honors Thesis Seminar

Required of honors majors who choose the research option.

Spring

1 Course Unit

RELS 3100 Orthodox America (SNF Paideia Program Course)

This course surveys the rich history of Orthodox Christian communities in North America from the early 19th century to the present day. Orthodox Christians from the Middle East, eastern Europe, Russia, Ethiopia, India, and elsewhere have immigrated to America for more than two hundred years, and contributed to the American religious, political, legal, literary, and material landscapes. Their stories are, however, rarely incorporated into the often Protestant-centric grand narratives of the history of religion in America. Through the lenses of post-colonial, immigration and diaspora, gender, media, and religious studies, this course surveys the literature, art, material culture, and religious practice of various Orthodox Christian communities, highlighting the multifaceted ways Orthodox Christianity shaped America. The classes will consist of robust study of primary sources and scholarly works (including theoretical, historical, and ethnographic works), critical engagement with representations of Orthodox Christians in mass media, social media, and popular culture, and museum and church visits. The course is offered both at graduate and advanced undergraduate level.

Mutually Exclusive: RELS 6100

1 Course Unit

RELS 3110 Religion & Politics in America

For over a century, scholars predicted religion's influence in the public sphere would decline due to the forces of modernization and secularization. They were wrong. Religion remains a strong influence on politics in America, shaping laws on the state and national level. This seminar analyzes the relationship between religion and politics in the United States from a historical and contemporary perspective. Students will examine liberal and conservative viewpoints regarding religion on a range of topics, including abortion, gay rights, race, the environment and capitalism

1 Course Unit

RELS 3170 "Black Spiritual Journeys: Modern African American Religious Memoir"

This seminar presents African Americans who have created religious and spiritual lives amid the variety of possibilities for religious belonging in the second half of the twentieth century and the early twenty-first century. By engaging an emerging canon of memoirs, we will take seriously the writings of Black spiritual gurus, theologians, hip hop philosophers, religious laity, activists, LGBTQ clergy, religious minorities, and scholars of religion as foundational for considering contemporary religious authority through popular and/or institutional forms of African American religious leadership. Themes of spiritual formation and religious belonging as a process—healing, self-making, writing, growing up, renouncing, dreaming, and liberating—characterize the religious journeys of the African American writers, thinkers, and leaders whose works we will examine. Each weekly session will also incorporate relevant audiovisual religious media, including online exhibits, documentary films, recorded sermons, tv series, performance art, and music.

Fall

Also Offered As: AFRC 3452

1 Course Unit

RELS 3203 Power and Peril: The Paradox of Monarchy among Ancient Greeks, Romans, and Jews

We imagine ancient Greece and Rome as the cradles of democracy and republicanism, early Judea as a pious theocracy, but monarchy was the most common and prevalent form of government in antiquity (and the premodern world in general). In this class, we will take a special look at kinship among the Jews, Greeks, and Romans to assess and discuss similarities, differences, and mutual influences. In all these cultures, the king was a polarizing figure in reality and in conception. On the one hand, some revered the monarch as ideal leader, and monarchy provided the language with which to describe and even imagine the very gods. On the other, monarchs were widely reviled in both theory and practice, from the Greek tyrants to biblical Saul. The Emperor Augustus loudly denied his own affinity to the office of king, even as he ruled alone and was revered as a god. In other words, kings stood both for the ideal and the worst form of government. This class confronts the paradox of monarchical rule and will, through the lens of the king, explore ideas of god, government, human frailty, and utopianism.

Not Offered Every Year

Also Offered As: ANCH 3203, CLST 3203, JWST 3203

1 Course Unit

RELS 3207 Conversion in Historical Perspective: Religion, Society, and Self

Changes of faith are complex shifts that involve social, spiritual, intellectual, and even physical alterations. In the premodern West, when legal status was often determined by religious affiliation and the state of one's soul was a deathly serious matter, such changes were even more fraught. What led a person to undertake an essential transformation of identity that could affect everything from food to family to spiritual fulfillment? Whether we are speaking of individual conversions of conscience or the coerced conversions of whole peoples en masse, religious change has been central to the global development and spread of Christianity, Judaism, and Islam, and reveals much about the people and contexts in which it took place. This seminar will explore the dynamics of conversion across a range of medieval and early modern contexts. We will investigate the motivations for conversions, the obstacles faced by converts, and the issues raised by conversion from the perspective of those who remained within a single tradition. How did conversion efforts serve globalization and empire, and what other power relations were involved? How did peoplehood, nationality, or race play out in conversion and its aftermath? How did premodern people understand conversion differently from each other, and differently than their coreligionists or scholars do today? The course will treat a number of specific examples, including autobiographical conversion narratives and conversion manuals, the role ascribed to conversion in visions of messianic redemption, forced conversions under Spanish and Ottoman rule, missionizing in the age of European expansion, and more. The course aims to hone students' skills in thinking about—and with—premodern religiosity, opening up new perspectives on the past and present by reading primary texts and analytical research.

Not Offered Every Year

Also Offered As: HIST 3203, JWST 3207

1 Course Unit

RELS 3330 Material Christianities

What can objects tell us about Christianity? How might a lavish mosaic, a withered body part, a dark crypt, or a pilgrim's oil lamp challenge and complicate visions of the past extracted from texts? This course investigates the first thousand years of Christianity through the lens of material culture. The history of Christianity - from its nebulous beginnings in Palestine to its recognition as the official religion of the Roman Empire and subsequent expansion - is often narrated from a perspective that privileges the writings of elite men. To capture the rich diversity in Christian experience and expression, we will turn to the material practices of religion and explore how things, places, and bodily acts shaped what it meant to be Christian. Building on insights drawn from archaeology, art history, anthropology, and religious studies, we will seek to recover the experiences of diverse and often marginalized subjects and communities, and in the process, will problematize the categories of religion, authority, and identity. Regular visits to the Penn Museum and other collections in Philadelphia will complement lectures and group discussions.

Also Offered As: ARTH 3330

Mutually Exclusive: ARTH 5330, RELS 5330

1 Course Unit

RELS 3333 Love and Sex in Buddhism

From monastic celibacy to sanctified sex, this course examines the wide variety of attitudes and practices towards love, desire, attachment, and pleasure in the Buddhist tradition. Readings include primary sources from South, Southeast, and East Asia, secondary scholarship on Buddhist social history and doctrine, and theoretical literature on gender, sex, and the body.

Spring, even numbered years only

Also Offered As: GSWS 4333

Mutually Exclusive: RELS 6333

Prerequisite: RELS 0050 OR RELS 1730 OR RELS 0130 OR RELS 0500 OR RELS 0790

1 Course Unit

RELS 3425 Gender, Religion, and China

This course examines the interrelationship among "gender," "religion," and "China" as conceptual and historical categories. We ask, for example, how gender plays critical and constitutive roles in Chinese religious traditions, how religion can be used both to reinforce and to challenge gender norms, how religious women impact Chinese society and culture, and what the construction of "China" as a cultural identity and as a nation-state has to do with women, gender, and religion. We will also think about what assumptions we have when speaking of gender, religion, and China, and the infinite possibilities when we strive to think beyond. We will read three kinds of materials: (1) scholarship on gender and religion in historical and contemporary China as well as the Chinese-speaking world, (2) scholarship concerning theories and methodology of gender and religious studies not necessarily focused on China, and (3) historical record of religious women in English translation.

Spring

Also Offered As: EALC 3425, GSWS 3425

1 Course Unit

RELS 3524 Daoist Traditions

This course examines the history of various intellectual and religious traditions that came to be known as Daoist (or Taoist in the Wade-Giles Romanization). We will begin with a critical review of the twentieth-century reinvention of Daoism and the new classification of religious versus philosophical Daoism, before tracing chronologically the textual, institutional, and social history of Daoist traditions from the fourth century B.C.E. While familiarizing students with the key concepts, practices, and organizations developed in the history of Daoism, this class emphasizes the specific socio-political context of each of them.

Throughout the course, we will think critically about the labeling of Daoist (as well as Confucian and Buddhist) in Chinese history and in modern scholarship. We will also question modern demarcations between philosophy, religion, and science, as well as that between the spiritual and the physical.

Not Offered Every Year

Also Offered As: EALC 3524

1 Course Unit

RELS 3560 Living Deliberately: Monks, Saints, and the Contemplative Life

Students who are not Religious Studies Majors and are not honors students must gain permission from instructor to enroll in this course. This is an experimental course in which students will experience monastic and ascetic ways of living. There will be no examinations, no formal papers, and very little required reading. However, each participant will need to be fully committed intellectually and participate in the monastic rules in the course involving restrictions on dress, technology, verbal communication, and food. The course subject matter is about ways in which nuns, monks, shamans, and swamis in various religious traditions (Buddhist, Muslim, Catholic, Jain, Taoist, Hindu, Animist, among others) have used poetry, meditation, mind-altering chemicals, exercise, magic, and self-torture to cope with pain and suffering, as well as struggle with spiritual, ethical, and metaphysical questions concerning the nature of the soul, the afterlife, and reality. Through monastic and spiritual practice, this course hopes to provide students with an opportunity to struggle with these questions themselves. Not Offered Every Year
1 Course Unit

RELS 3999 Directed Reading

Students arrange with a faculty member to pursue a program of reading and writing on a suitable topic. Fall or Spring
1 Course Unit

RELS 4050 Religion, Social Justice & Urban Development

Urban development has been influenced by religious conceptions of social and economic justice. Progressive traditions within Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, Jainism, Baha'i, Humanism and other religions and systems of moral thought have yielded powerful critiques of oppression and hierarchy as well as alternative economic frameworks for ownership, governance, production, labor, and community. Historical and contemporary case studies from the Americas, Europe, Africa, Asia, and the Middle East will be considered, as we examine the ways in which religious responses to poverty, inequality, and ecological destruction have generated new forms of resistance and development. Spring
Also Offered As: AFRC 4050, URBS 4050
1 Course Unit

RELS 4080 Africana Sacred Communities in the U.S.

This undergraduate seminar places contemporary Black spiritualities at the center of the study of African-descended peoples. Through recent books in the ethnography of Africana religions, spiritual communities in Africa, the Caribbean, and North America that have established communities in the United States will constitute the focus of our course readings and anchor our weekly discussions. As an advanced seminar, our meetings will allow participants to interrogate the authors of these ethnographies. We will assess how these accounts have conceptualized the African diaspora and the vantages ("insiders" and "outsiders") from which they describe religious beliefs, practices, and institutions. Beyond considering the commonalities and distinctions in form and practice that characterize various African diasporic religious practices, participants will also work to understand the constructions of race and belonging, ethnic identity, gender, sexuality, class, and geographic location that affect the lives of Black religious adherents. Fall or Spring
Also Offered As: AFRC 4052
1 Course Unit

RELS 4140 Creating a Constitution in Israel

Why does the State of Israel not have a constitution? If it ever establishes a constitution, what will it consist of? How would it impact contemporary Israeli politics if it voted to accept one? The aim of this course, offered in conjunction with Penn's law school, is to explore the attempt to write a constitution for Israel in light of readings and the instructor's personal experience as a member of Israel's parliament (the Knesset) and chair of its Constitution, Law and Justice Committee at the time that it drafted a full Israeli constitution. We will explore legal and political issues and controversies involved in the effort to create a constitution, including issues bearing on the relationship of religion and the state in Israel, and will seek to understand the process in light of larger social, historical and philosophical contexts. Not Offered Every Year
Also Offered As: JWST 4130
1 Course Unit

RELS 4300 Rabbinic Writers on Rabbinic Culture

This course traces reflections on rabbinic culture produced within Jewish legal literature of the classic rabbinic period -- Midrash, Mishna, and Talmud -- and in later juridical genres -- Talmudic commentary, codes and responses. Attention will be paid to the mechanics of different genres, the role of the underlying proof text, the inclusion or exclusion of variant opinions, the presence of non-legal information, the balance between precedent and innovation. Reading knowledge of Hebrew is required. Not Offered Every Year
Also Offered As: HEBR 4000, JWST 4000
1 Course Unit

RELS 4305 Spirit and Law

While accepting "the yoke of the commandments", Jewish thinkers from antiquity onward have perennially sought to make the teachings of revelation more meaningful in their own lives. Additional impetus for this quest has come from overtly polemical challenges to the law, such as those leveled by Paul, medieval Aristotelians, Spinoza and Kant. This course explores both the critiques of Jewish Law, and Jewish reflections on the Law's meaning and purpose, by examining a range of primary sources within their intellectual and historical contexts. Texts (in English translation) include selections from Midrash, Talmud, medieval Jewish philosophy and biblical exegesis, kabbalah, Hasidic homilies, Jewish responses to the Enlightenment, and contemporary attempts to re-value and invent Jewish rituals. Not Offered Every Year
Also Offered As: JWST 4305, MELC 4305, NELC 4305
1 Course Unit

RELS 4998 Advanced Research Project

Guided independent research under department faculty supervision. Fall or Spring
1 Course Unit

RELS 4999 Culminating Experience

Required of majors who do not choose the honors thesis option. 1 Course Unit

RELS 5000 Theory and Method in the Study of Religion

This graduate seminar will map the theories and methods underpinning the contemporary study of religion. To draw this map, we will consider the history of the field. We'll proceed by examining how problems within religious studies have been resolved in different ways at different times, constructing a web of dialogs and debates between different figures across history. Specific topics to be considered will include experience, discourse, embodiment, feminism, postcolonialism, science, and materiality.

Not Offered Every Year

1 Course Unit

RELS 5010 Sacred Stuff in Medieval & Early Modern Europe

During devotional activities people engage with various objects and believe that they are imbued with religious significance. In this seminar, we will explore the material culture of religion across medieval and early modern Europe. From rosary beads and crucifixes to devotional books, prints, and paintings, a range of "sacred stuff" populated the lives of medieval and early modern Europeans. We will consider objects associated with daily life as well as rites of passage. We will study objects of Christian devotion and will consider how the advent of Protestantism and the Catholic Reformation influenced the types of objects devotees used for their devotion. In this seminar, we will discuss the material culture of Judaism and Islam, religions also practiced in medieval and early modern Europe. We will engage with "sacred stuff" from a variety of disciplinary perspectives, including art history, literature, archaeology, social history, and cultural history. We will then hone these skills with visits to local museums and libraries where we will view medieval and early modern books, objects and images. Course assignments will include an in-depth analysis of a devotional object from medieval or early modern Europe chosen by the student.

Not Offered Every Year

1 Course Unit

RELS 5022 The Icon

This seminar explores the Byzantine icon and its legacy. Spanning nearly two millennia, from the emergence of Christian sacred portraiture to the reception of icon painting by the early twentieth-century Russian avant-garde, the seminar will introduce you to the history, historiography, and theories of the icon. While our focus will be on Byzantium and the wider world of Orthodox Christianity, especially in the Slavic Balkans and Eastern Europe, the seminar will also engage with fundamental questions concerning the nature, status, and agency of images across cultures. Topics to be addressed include iconoclasm and the problem of idolatry; the social and ritual lives of icons; authorship, originality, and replication; viewer response and the cultural construction of vision; the frontier between art and the sacred image; and the afterlife of the icon in modernity. Open to graduate and undergraduate students.

Not Offered Every Year

Also Offered As: AAMW 5320, ARTH 5320

1 Course Unit

RELS 5030 The "Field" of Religious Studies

This seminar examines the intertwined roots of religious studies and area studies. Both fields emerged as byproducts of colonization and missionary endeavor, and both received newfound legitimacy in the context of the Cold War and the subsequent War on Terror. Examining the spaces and places that have constituted "the field" of religious studies, this course historicizes the non-confessional academic study of religion while simultaneously highlighting the theological assumptions that have implicitly informed area studies.

Spring, even numbered years only

1 Course Unit

RELS 5040 Secularisms: Critical Secularism Studies

This course is an introduction to the trans-disciplinary subfield known as "critical secularism studies." The shared premises of this internally diverse field is that religion is made by people, that such religion-making can be described as secularism, and that secularist policies and epistemologies (secularity) offer the illusion of clarity while also introducing uncertainty. Scholars of critical secularism studies are generally critical of old-school narratives of secularization, but they are keenly attentive to the contradictions introduced by (post)colonial settings, industrial capitalism, and neoliberal economic formations. Scholars in this field see these contexts and historical processes as contributing to differentiation and diversification in fields conventionally marked by the terms "religion," "government," "economy," "medicine," and so forth. Because attending to secularist religion-making typically involves investigating shifting conceptions of public and private, the field has also developed strong critical work around questions of race, gender, sexuality, and (to a lesser extent) disability and class.

Fall, even numbered years only

1 Course Unit

RELS 5050 Religion & Cinema

This course looks at religion in film. As we will see, this is not just a question of how religion is represented onscreen, but how cinematic objects make religious subjects. We'll explore the ways films are crafted through technique, performance, and distribution, then consider how these components shape religious bodies and religious traditions in turn.

Spring

Also Offered As: CIMS 5050

1 Course Unit

RELS 5090 Teaching Religion

Many faculty in academia, especially at a research university, think of themselves as scholars first and teachers second. The emphasis on scholarship is essential for a position at a research university, but what the culture of such institutions can obscure is the importance of teaching as part of the academic vocation. The purpose of this course is to help prepare graduate students to teach academic religious studies, not to teach them how to teach, a skill developed through experience and feedback, but to encourage students to plan in advance for their work as educators and to develop their teaching aspirations and approach in dialogue with issues and debates in Religious Studies, the Humanities and the field of Education.

Fall

1 Course Unit

RELS 5100 Civil Religion

In the first half of the course, we will examine the theoretical question of whether modern liberal societies need a civil religion - an idea first proposed in the late eighteenth century by writer who feared that without some unifying ideal or principle the centrifugal forces at work in modern societies would lead them to disintegrate. We will examine various authors who have defended the idea of civil religion in these terms (including J.J. Rousseau, J.G. Herder, and G.W.F. Hegel) as well as several who (implicitly or explicitly) have rejected the argument (Max Weber, Michael Oakeshott, Daniel Bell, and Niklas Luhmann). In the second half of the class, we will turn to the American context and explore the way these arguments have played themselves out from the time of the constitutional frames to today. In this part of the class, we will read and discuss excerpts from the Federalist Papers and Tocqueville's *Democracy in America*, selected presidential speeches, nineteenth- and twentieth-century debates surrounding Manifest Destiny and American Exceptionalism, John Dewey/Richard Rorty's proposal for a religion of democratic "common faith," and the neoconservative case for a civil religion of "national greatness." Along the way we will also have occasion to examine sociological treatments of civil religion by such authors as Emile Durkheim, Robert Bellah, and Seymour Martin Lipset.

Not Offered Every Year

1 Course Unit

RELS 5101 Friendship: Ethics, Community, Modernity

Friendship is a global keyword and a major ethical concept in various traditions. Given its distinct grammars and histories, friendship is impossible to define once and for all. Instead of reducing this multifaceted category to a set of definitions, this course explores the following overarching questions: What sensibilities and practices has the notion of friendship articulated in different societies—past and present? How did dominant ideas about what constitutes friendship change historically in the West? Given friendship's capacity to forge strange affections and experimental modes of sociality, in what ways can it provide alternatives to, and challenge, the more standardized bonds of kinship and the modern nation? We will ponder these and other questions related to friendship by engaging with anthropology, philosophy, and film.

Spring

1 Course Unit

RELS 5150 Syriac Christianity Past and Present

This course surveys the long and diverse history of Syriac-speaking Christianity, from the 4th century CE to the modern era. Syriac Christianity refers to the individuals and groups that identify with the linguistic, liturgical, and cultural traditions of the Syriac language, a dialect of Aramaic that has been spoken in Mesopotamia, Syria and beyond in late antiquity, through the Middle Ages until today. We will study the literature, material culture, ritual practice, theology, and other aspects of the Syriac Church, as well as its encounters with other religious communities. While we will explore the key figures and formative events that are remembered as foundational, we will incorporate the understudied elements of Syriac Christianity, such as gender, non-elite forms of piety and devotion, and music and aesthetics. Through the lens of Syriac Christianity, we will analyze the relationships between religion and language, scripture, myth-making, human body, race, state, geography, and movement. Knowledge of the Syriac language is not required for this course.

Fall or Spring

1 Course Unit

RELS 5170 Topics in American Religion

From Marvin Gaye, to Tammy Faye Baker, to Sarah Palin and James Baldwin, Pentecostalism has influenced many, including politicians, preachers, writers, and the media. One of the fastest growing religious movements in the world, Pentecostalism continues to have a profound effect on the religious landscape. Pentecostalism's unique blend of charismatic worship, religious practices, and flamboyant, media-savvy leadership, has drawn millions into this understudies and often controversial religious movement. This course will chronicle the inception and growth of Pentecostalism in the United States, giving particular attention to beliefs, practices, gender, ethnicity, and Global Pentecostalism.

Not Offered Every Year

Also Offered As: AFRC 5170

1 Course Unit

RELS 5172 The Black Freedom Spirit: Readings in African American Religious History II

This graduate seminar introduces participants to the major works and themes in the field of African American religious history, covering the period of colonial encounters through the middle decades of the twentieth century. This graduate seminar focuses on histories of activism, organizing, and alternative forms of institution-building by religious women and men of African descent in African American Religious History. Our readings attend to the regional, gendered, sociopolitical, intellectual, and international dimensions of African American religious history. Seminar participants will also critically examine the place of Black Christianity (sometimes defined as Afro-Protestantism) in scholarly constructions of African American religions, acquiring the grounding to rethink, nuance, and expand the field beyond conventional focuses. The seminar's primary aims are to help participants define interests within the field to pursue further study, to consider potential areas of research, and to aid preparation for doctoral examinations.

Spring

Also Offered As: AFRC 5172

1 Course Unit

RELS 5250 Cults and New Religious Movements

This course offers a thematic introduction to the history of New Religious Movements (NRM) from the mid-19th century to the present day. Often labeled as "cults" by the state and established religious institutions, new religions offer modern believers alternative spiritual and ideological solutions to age-old problems. In this class, students will be introduced to the teachings and practices of prominent NRMs, from global movements such as Scientology, Mormonism, and Hare Krishna to lesser known groups such as the Source Family, the Church of All Worlds, and Raëlism. Main topics will include the emergence of the public discourse on cults, brainwashing, and deprogramming, the role of mass media in framing the relationship between NRMs such as the Peoples Temple and the Branch Davidians and violence, and the rise of populist cults of personality in the 21st century. In addition, we will learn how NRMs such as Wicca and the Children of God helped reshape gender roles and change mainstream views about sexuality, and explore the role played by race in shaping public perception of Asian-inspired religions such as Transcendental Meditation and the Unification Church. Throughout the semester, students will be exposed to a wide variety of primary and secondary sources, from academic articles and scholarly essays to documentaries, feature films, and TV shows.

Summer Term

1 Course Unit

RELS 5330 Material Christianities

What can objects tell us about Christianity? How might a lavish mosaic, a withered body part, a dark crypt, or a pilgrim's oil lamp challenge and complicate visions of the past extracted from texts? This course investigates the first thousand years of Christianity through the lens of material culture. The history of Christianity - from its nebulous beginnings in Palestine to its recognition as the official religion of the Roman Empire and subsequent expansion - is often narrated from a perspective that privileges the writings of elite men. To capture the rich diversity in Christian experience and expression, we will turn to the material practices of religion and explore how things, places, and bodily acts shaped what it meant to be Christian. Building on insights drawn from archaeology, art history, anthropology, and religious studies, we will seek to recover the experiences of diverse and often marginalized subjects and communities, and in the process, will problematize the categories of religion, authority, and identity. Regular visits to the Penn Museum and other collections in Philadelphia will complement lectures and group discussions.

Also Offered As: ARTH 5330

Mutually Exclusive: ARTH 3330, RELS 3330

1 Course Unit

RELS 5340 Christian Thought From 1000 to 1800

This course will trace the development of Christian thought (including philosophy, theology, spirituality and mysticism) from the early Scholastic period to early Methodism. Readings will be from both primary and secondary sources. A research paper will be required of each student.

Spring 2014: This course will give an overview of the main currents of Western Christian thought from the first age of reform (that is, the Central Middle Ages) through the Reformations of the sixteenth century, to the eve of the Enlightenment. In these centuries, "Christendom" underwent an almost constant process of internal and external self-definition. The most striking results of this process were the definitive separation of eastern and western Christianity and the division of the western church into what became known as Protestant and Catholic Christianity. Our focus will be on the changing definitions of Christian culture, including theological formulations (definitions of orthodoxy and heterodoxy), trends of spirituality and mysticism, forms of worship, and gender roles and definitions. Attention will also be given to institutional questions such as ecclesiastical hierarchy, monasticism, scholasticism and the rise of universities, and the changing relationship between the secular and religious worlds. Readings will be from both original and secondary sources. Additional primary sources will be available online, attached to the course Blackboard page. I will supply copies of other readings. Students will write two papers. The first (due Feb. 8) is a 5-7 pp. analysis of a primary source from the class, for which another text may be substituted by permission of the instructor. The second paper, due at the end of the course, should be a more ambitious research paper (at least 10 pp. for undergraduates, longer for graduate students) that includes some aspect of this history we did not directly study in class.

Prerequisite: Some background in European history is helpful.

Not Offered Every Year

1 Course Unit

RELS 5380 Topics in Medieval History

This course introduces students to the development of Christian biblical interpretation by focusing on ancient, medieval, and modern interpretations of the Sermon on the Mount. Students will encounter a variety of important interpreters (including Origen, Tertullian, Gregory of Nyssa, John Chrysostom, Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, Luther, Leo Tolstoy, Albert Schweitzer, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, and Hans Dieter Betz), guided by appropriate secondary materials. The Sermon on the Mount is part of the Gospel of Matthew and is often considered to summarize the essential teachings of Jesus of Nazareth. This course has no prerequisites. Readings will be made available in English. Students will be encouraged to do original research in the primary sources.

Fall or Spring

1 Course Unit

RELS 5410 Religion and the Visual Image: Seeing is Believing

Seeing is Believing engages in a historical, theoretical, and cross-cultural analysis of the place of visuality in religion and of religion in visual culture. We will examine images, buildings, places, objects, performances and events. The geographical, cultural and historical scope of the material is broad, including subjects from Europe, the Islamic World, non-Muslim South Asia, the US and Latin America from the medieval period until the present. Theoretical works will be read in conjunction with representative examples to invite intellectual engagement in a socially and historically grounded way. Important issues to be covered include the relationship of visual to material culture; visual theories versus theories of vision; locating religion in human sensory experience; perception at individual and collective levels; authenticities, fakes and simulacra; iconoclasm and image veneration; aesthetics, use and utility; and things.

Not Offered Every Year

Also Offered As: MELC 6560, NELC 6560, SAST 5410

1 Course Unit

RELS 5440 Beloved: Islam through its Literature

This course explores Islam as a practiced religion through the theme of love as described in literature. The seminar examines a broad range of writing including hymns, love poetry, epic romances, short stories and novels. The materials will be drawn from the entire history of Islamic society from the 8th century until the present, and from a spectrum of cultural contexts and languages, including Arabic, Persian, Turkish, Urdu and Punjabi. In addition to introducing students to the literature and its contexts, the course will explore issues such as the place of emotion in religion, the erotic as a frame of expressing religious relationships, the connection between religion and visual art, the limits of language and problems of translation. Open to undergraduates with permission.

Spring

1 Course Unit

RELS 5445 Islam and Revolution

Islamic history is typically told as a history of continuity. A range of otherwise sharply divergent Muslim communities shape themselves in terms of an unbroken tradition stretching back to the Prophet Muhammad. In this course we will adopt a different approach, reading Islamic history in terms of rupture. A basic premise of this course is that directing our focus in the study of Islam to models and moments of radical political change will necessarily reorient our understanding of Islam in the present. In particular, we will focus on messianism and the figure of the Mahdi in an effort to understand how this figure was deployed differently in three broad periods of Islamic history: the formative period beginning with Muhammad's initial revolution in seventh-century Arabia through the Mongols' destruction of the caliphate in 1258, the millennial period of post-Mongol Sufism through the colonial era, and the postcolonial period through today. While we will address famous cases such as Iran's 1979 Islamic Revolution, a key aim of the course will be to think about revolution beyond the framework of the state and its overthrow, and Islam beyond its currently most visible forms of scripture-mediated piety. How do Islamic ritual practices prefigure and create political change, broadly construed? How do revolutions and their aftermaths negotiate and articulate difference within Islam? How have Muslim rulers and revolutionaries approached the problem of violence; what have they considered legitimate violence and on what terms? We will ask these and related questions in conversation with a variety of historical, anthropological, and theological texts.

1 Course Unit

RELS 5450 Sufi Thought and Literature

This course is an intensive survey of the rich variety of Islamic intellectual, literary and cultural phenomena subsumed under the term Sufism. Sufi philosophies, liturgical practices, and social organizations have been a major part of the Islamic tradition in all historical periods, and Sufism has also served as a primary muse behind Islamic aesthetic expression in poetry, music, and the visual arts. In this course, we will explore the various significations of Sufism by addressing both the world of ideas and socio-cultural practices. The course is divided into three broad sections: central themes and concepts going back to the earliest individuals who identified themselves as Sufis; Sufi metaphysics and epistemology as exemplified in the work of Ibn al-'Arabi and his school, and literary expressions as exemplified in the epic poem Layla and Majnun by Nizami, The Conference of the Birds by Attar, and in the life and poetry of Mawlana Jalaluddin Rumi. In studying this material, we will be concerned equally with establishing common patterns and seeing how being a Sufi has meant different things to various people over the course of history.

Not Offered Every Year

1 Course Unit

RELS 5470 Topics in the Study of Religion

This course deals with various religious topics, such as Mass Religious Conversion.

Not Offered Every Year

Also Offered As: AFRC 5470

1 Course Unit

RELS 5520 Affect Theory and Power

This seminar will examine contemporary affect theory and its relationship with Michel Foucault's theory of power. We will begin by mapping out Foucault's "analytics of power," from his early work on power knowledge to his late work on embodiment, desire, and the care of the self. We will then turn to affect theory, an approach which centralizes the non-rational, emotive force of power. No previous knowledge of theory is required.

Also Offered As: COML 5520, GSWS 5520

1 Course Unit

RELS 5555 History of Hinduism

This course will explore the history of the religion(s) designated by the term 'Hinduism' from their earliest articulations down to the rise of modern reforms in the nineteenth century. The study of Hinduism is perhaps unique among the scholarly traditions on world religions in that it has to date had no serious connected account of its historical development, as scholars have preferred to take structural, sociological, phenomenological, and doctrinal approaches to the religion. The course, after a brief review of scholarly approaches to Hinduism and their interpretive legacies, will seek to develop a historical sense of the religion through attention to shifts in liturgy, ritual, theology, doctrine, sacral kingship, and soteriology. The course will include the reading of primary sources relevant to understanding these changes as well as highlight both modern and premodern traditions of their interpretation. It will also consider and assess some of the key interpretive ideas in the study of Hinduism, including, Sanskritization, Great and Little Traditions, cult formation, regional and popular religious movements, and canon formation. There will also be sustained consideration of the question of religion and socio-political power as well as relations between Hinduism and other religions like Buddhism and Islam.

Not Offered Every Year

Also Offered As: SAST 5550

1 Course Unit

RELS 5570 An Intellectual History of Pakistan : Religion and politics

The course will introduce students to significant events in Pakistan's history, critical foundational moments, and key religious-political texts. To make the course theoretically rigorous, I have conceptualized it in a broader framework of intellectual history. My focus would be on probing an interrelated set of questions about class, postcoloniality, Cold War politics, worker mobilizations, Political Islam, a non-Western history of citizenship and democracy, decoloniality, and feminist movements. Thus, the course's focus is not on a chronology of events in Pakistan but on providing a reading praxis and a form of inquiry with which we should understand the postcolonial histories of the global South.

1 Course Unit

RELS 5600 Creating Black Sacred Cultures: Readings in African American Religious History

This graduate seminar entertains the history of African American cultural production primarily in the twentieth century through foundational and emerging works in the field. This seminar focuses on African American religious history, with a focus on the material, visual, auditory, and literary religious constructions of everyday worlds, lives, and professions.

Our readings attend to intersectional dimensions of African American religious life, highlighting the connections of race, gender identity, sexual orientation, class, alternative religious identities, and region. A focus on Black cultural production and its producers enriches African American religious history. Seminar participants will engage the theoretical concerns and methodological approaches that illuminate the ways that Black women and men capture and (re)shape the meaning of their worlds in a variety of domestic, professional, social, and political settings. The seminar's primary aims are to help participants define interests within the field to pursue further study, to consider potential areas of research, and to aid preparation for doctoral examinations.

Spring

Also Offered As: AFRC 5600

1 Course Unit

RELS 5710 Advanced Topics in Buddhism

This is an advanced course for upper level undergraduates and graduate students on various issues in the study of Buddhist texts, art, and history. Each semester the theme of the course changes. In recent years themes have included: Magic and Ritual, Art and Material Culture, Texts and Contexts, Manuscript Studies. Fall 2013 Topic: Buddhist repertoires (idiosyncratic and personal assemblages of beliefs, reflections, wonderings, possessions, and practices) for a large part, material and sensual. Buddhists are often sustained by their collection, production, and trading of stuff amulets, images, posters, protective drawings, CDs, calendars, films, comic books, and even Buddhist-themed pillow cases, umbrellas, and coffee mugs. Aspirations are interconnected with objects. Beliefs are articulated through objects. Objects are not empty signifiers onto which meaning is placed. The followers and the objects, the collectors and their stuff, are overlooked in the study of religion, even in many studies in the growing field of material culture and religion. What is striking is that these objects of everyday religiosity are often overlooked by art historians as well. Art historians often remove (through photography or physical movement to museums or shops) images and ritual implements from their ritual context and are seen as objets d'art. While art historians influenced by Alfred Gell, Arjun Appadurai, and Daniel Miller have brought the study of ritual objects into the forefront of art historical studies, in terms of methodologies of studying Buddhist art, art historians have generally relegated themselves to the study of either the old and valuable or the static and the curated. This course aims to 1) bring a discussion of art into the study of living Buddhism. Art historians have primarily concentrated on the study of images, stupas, manuscripts, and murals produced by the elite, and primarily made before the twentieth century; 2) study art as it exists and operates in dynamic ritual activities and highly complex synchronic and diachronic relationships; 3) focus on the historical and material turn in the study of images, amulets, and murals in Buddhist monasteries and shrines.

Not Offered Every Year

Also Offered As: ARTH 5120, EALC 5501

1 Course Unit

RELS 5750 Religion in Eleven Objects

This advanced course for Religious Studies majors and minors approaches the study of religion through material objects. By looking at both sacred and everyday objects like rosaries melted in atomic blasts, magical amulets used in healing rituals, temple murals defaced by invading armies, manuscript stained by hold water, we will explore the many ways people express their spiritual aspirations and existential fears through objects. Not only will a different object from a variety of religious traditions be examined each week (eleven in total), but we will also explore different methodological and theoretical approaches to the study of religion. Psychological, phenomenological, bio-genetic, sociological, art historical, discursive, post-modern, and narrative approaches will be discussed.

1 Course Unit

RELS 5860 History of Islam in South Asia

This class is designed to structure reflection on Islam and Islamic culture in South Asia, including intensive discussions on the placement of boundaries of "Islamic" culture, performance, and identity. We will ask where and how these boundaries have evolved with reference to language, ritual, politics, and nationalism in South Asia. We will position our readings and reflections in the disciplines of Religious Studies and Social and Cultural History. If you already have a solid background in South Asian history, this class is perfect for you. If you do not, you will need to do more work behind the scenes to get the basics in place to participate fully in course discussions. We will structure our study with particular attention to significant urban spaces in South Asia. While studies of what constitutes a public and even a nation have focused on the impact of European models, the particular interaction of Islam with all other identity-constitutive areas of life must be grounded in the South Asian context. To drive this home, each of the topics will be grounded in a particular urban space or set of connected urban spaces; we will also consider the differences between this approach and prominent intellectual history approaches. How are public spaces imagined in South Asia, and how are they linked to identity? This class takes a typological approach to studies of the public in South Asia; namely, instead of the public arriving as a European import, this course assumes that we can observe public formation particular to South Asia and independent from European public characteristics. The class will involve regular consideration of a range of primary sources including amulets in the Penn Museum collection and original documents held in the Special Collections at the University of Pennsylvania and the U.S. Library of Congress. For this class, you must have some background in study of South Asia and/or study of Islam. Aside from guiding reflection on literature key to the history of Islam in South Asia, the course is also designed to help you learn how to do several tasks essential to the work of a productive academic professional. You will learn to: Participate confidently in seminars and scholarly discussions on shared readings. Read effectively and efficiently for seminar discussions. Lead seminar discussions. Design and execute an independent research project relevant to the class. Design, pitch, and present a 20-minute seminar paper

Fall, even numbered years only

Also Offered As: SAST 5860

Prerequisites: Graduate Students Only; advanced undergraduates must obtain professor permission to enroll in the course.

1 Course Unit

RELS 5900 Religious Nationalisms: A Global Perspective

Religious nationalism is the fusion of religion with national and ethnic identity. Since the 1970's it has become an important force in reshaping political activity, and the relationship of religious movements and groups to governments around the world. This seminar will explore religions, political actors, and philosophies that have made religious nationalism a potent force for polarization and political power in the 21st century. Traditional scholarship on nationalism has focused on secularism and the decline of religion, but since the 1970's, appeals to religious belief and ethnic identity as defining foundations of the nation-state have increased. The project of democracy and modernity has butted against postmodern beliefs and the desire of many religious nationalists to return to "tradition", to hold their ethnoreligious identities as the pure foundation of the state against the encroaching boundaries of globalization and immigration. Politicians have used religious nationalism as a wedge to consolidate power, enact draconian laws, and to define the boundaries of national and ethnic identity. Religious leaders have used it to shape public policy to mirror religious beliefs, and to gain temporal and spiritual authority. This course covers the late 20th and early 21st centuries, exploring how the rise of religious nationalism has been a destabilizing force.

Not Offered Every Year

1 Course Unit

RELS 6080 Worlds of Late Antiquity

The period between the third and eighth centuries - from the Tetrarchy led by Diocletian to the rise of Umayyad Caliphate - is characteristically regarded as a period of ferment and change, whether that be on the still-influential model of Decline and Fall first proposed by Edward Gibbon in the eighteenth century or the somewhat less deterministic account of transformation favored by Peter Brown in the late twentieth. These narratives tend to emphasize the large-scale processes that played out over these centuries, such as the florescence and fragmentation of two world empires; the emergence of two highly influential monotheistic religions of the book; and the codification of legal systems that continue to dominate contemporary practices and theories of law. Equally, what characterizes these centuries is the particular granularity and character of the textual and archaeological evidence that exists for the functioning of this world at the micro-scale, as against the periods that preceded and followed. This course traces the social, economic, cultural, and religious institutions and processes that make this period distinctive, explores the nature of the evidence for those institutions and processes, and exposes to scrutiny the assumptions and preconceptions that underpin the scholarly narratives that have been constructed about them.

Not Offered Every Year

Also Offered As: ANCH 6080, MELC 6080, NELC 6080

1 Course Unit

RELS 6100 Orthodox America

This course surveys the rich history of Orthodox Christian communities in North America from the early 19th century to the present day. Orthodox Christians from the Middle East, eastern Europe, Russia, Ethiopia, India, and elsewhere have immigrated to America for more than two hundred years, and contributed to the American religious, political, legal, literary, and material landscapes. Their stories are, however, rarely incorporated into the often Protestant-centric grand narratives of the history of religion in America. Through the lenses of post-colonial, immigration and diaspora, gender, media, and religious studies, this course surveys the literature, art, material culture, and religious practice of various Orthodox Christian communities, highlighting the multifaceted ways Orthodox Christianity shaped America. The classes will consist of robust study of primary sources and scholarly works (including theoretical, historical, and ethnographic works), critical engagement with representations of Orthodox Christians in mass media, social media, and popular culture, and museum and church visits. The course is offered both at graduate and advanced undergraduate level.

Fall or Spring

Mutually Exclusive: RELS 3100

1 Course Unit

RELS 6101 Topics in Medieval Studies: Premodern Animals (c.500-c.1500)

From St. Cuthbert, whose freezing feet were warmed by otters, to St. Guinefort, a miracle-performing greyhound in 13th-century France, to Melusine, the half-fish, half-woman ancestress of the house of Luxembourg (now the Starbucks logo), medieval narratives are deeply inventive in their portrayal of human-animal interactions. This course introduces students to critical animals studies via medieval literature and culture. We will read a range of genres, from philosophical commentaries on Aristotle and theological commentaries on Noah's ark to werewolf poems, beast fables, political satires, saints' lives, chivalric romances, bestiaries, natural encyclopaedias, dietary treatises and travel narratives. Among the many topics we will explore are the following: animals in premodern law; comfort and companion animals; vegetarianism across religious cultures; animal symbolism and human virtue; taxonomies of species in relation to race, gender, and class; literary animals and political subversion; menageries and collecting across medieval Europe, the Near East, and Asia; medieval notions of hybridity, compositeness, trans-species identity, and interspecies relationships; art and the global traffic in animals (e.g., ivory, parchment); European encounters with New World animals; and the legacy of medieval animals in contemporary philosophy and media. No prior knowledge of medieval literature is required. Students from all disciplines are welcome.

Also Offered As: CLST 7710, COML 5245, ENGL 5245

1 Course Unit

RELS 6200 Studies in Medieval Jewish Culture

Through close reading of primary sources in the original Hebrew, participants in this seminar will explore historical circumstances that engaged and shaped medieval Jews in both Christian and Muslim lands, along with the enduring cultural projects that Jews themselves produced. Topics will include Geonim, Karaism, the encounter of Reason and Revelation; the Christian "Other": the Muslim "Other"; legal codification; the Tosafist project; Rhineland Pietism; Minhag (custom); family life; the aesthetic dimension; Kabbalah; conversos; messianism. Students should be able to comfortably read unpointed Hebrew.

Fall

Also Offered As: HEBR 6200, JWST 6200

1 Course Unit

RELS 6333 Love and Sex in Buddhism

From monastic celibacy to sanctified sex, this course examines the wide variety of attitudes and practices towards love, desire, attachment, and pleasure in the Buddhist tradition. Readings include primary sources from South, Southeast, and East Asia, secondary scholarship on Buddhist social history and doctrine, and theoretical literature on gender, sex, and the body.

Spring, even numbered years only

Mutually Exclusive: RELS 3333

1 Course Unit

RELS 6510 Approaches to Islamic Law

This course aims to introduce students to the study of Islamic law, the all-embracing sacred law of Islam. In this course we will attempt to consider many different facets of the historical, doctrinal, institutional and social complexity of Islamic law. In addition, the various approaches that have been taken to the study of these aspects of Islamic law will be analyzed. The focus will be mostly, though not exclusively, on classical Islamic law. Specific topics covered include the beginnings of legal thought in Islam, various areas of Islamic positive law (substantive law), public and private legal institutions, Islamic legal theory, and issues in the contemporary development and application of Islamic law.

Not Offered Every Year

Also Offered As: MELC 6510, NELC 6510

1 Course Unit

RELS 6560 Religion in Modern South Asia

This core seminar introduces graduate students to key themes in the study of religion in modern South Asia, with a focus on debates related to Hinduism, Islam, and Christianity in India from the nineteenth century to the present. Drawing upon a range of methodological and theoretical approaches, the seminar covers themes such as colonial and missionary constructions of religious categories, Orientalism and textual authority, social and religious "reform" movements, questions of caste and gender, and debates about religious nationalisms, democracy, and secularism.

Not Offered Every Year

Also Offered As: SAST 6645

1 Course Unit

RELS 6632 Hinduism and Colonial Modernity

This seminar deals with the question of modernity in South Asia, with a specific focus on the construction, dissemination, and politicization of Hinduism in nineteenth and twentieth century India. It focuses on three central heuristic lenses—namely those of European imperialism, Orientalism, and nationalism—to study modernity and its discontents. What was at stake in the encounter between colonial modernity and India's religions in nineteenth and early twentieth centuries? How did colonial and native discourses on "reform" and "revival" shape Indian religions as we understand them today? How is modern "Hinduism" inextricably hinged to early forms of cultural transnationalism, Orientalism, and incipient forms of nationalism? This seminar approaches questions such as these and others, with an eye to understanding how nineteenth and early twentieth century discourses continue to shape contemporary understandings of Hinduism in deep and highly politicized ways.

Not Offered Every Year

Also Offered As: SAST 6632

1 Course Unit

RELS 6710 The Politics of Shinto

Shinto-derived images and ideas frequently appear in Japanese anime and film, and journalists and academics frequently mobilize the term Shinto as a way of explaining Japan's past or envisioning its future. The environmentalist left champions a green Shinto while Shinto-derived ideas serve as red meat for politicians pandering to Japan's nationalist right. While the influential position Shinto occupies in Japanese sociopolitical life is therefore clear, the term Shinto itself is actually not. Depending on who one asks, Shinto is either the venerable indigenous religion of the Japanese archipelago, the irreducible core of Japanese culture, a tiny subset of Japanese Buddhism, an environmentalist ethic, or some combination of these. This course investigates the multifarious types of Shinto envisioned by these competing interest groups.

Also Offered As: EALC 6550

Mutually Exclusive: RELS 2710

1 Course Unit

RELS 7420 Qur'anic Studies

This seminar explores the nature and uses of the Qur'an. It focuses on the practice and theory of Qur'an commentary and interpretation (safsir and ta'wil). A major portion of the course will involve a close examination of manuscripts of the Qur'an at the Philadelphia Museum of Art and the Kislak Center at the University of Pennsylvania, concentrating on the relationship between the text and marginalia as well as on the peculiarities of individual manuscripts. The rest of the course will center around reading commentaries on the Qur'an in manuscript as well as print. In addition, we will read and discuss theoretical works on the history and nature of Qur'an commentary, literary criticism and textual analysis, and spend some of the later section of the course discussing issues of translation and editorial processes involved in popularizing Qur'an commentaries on the internet. READING KNOWLEDGE OF ARABIC REQUIRED.

Not Offered Every Year

Also Offered As: MELC 7550, NELC 7550

1 Course Unit

RELS 7425 Gender, Religion, and China

This course examines the interrelationship among "gender," "religion," and "China" as conceptual and historical categories. We ask, for example, how gender plays critical and constitutive roles in Chinese religious traditions, how religion can be used both to reinforce and to challenge gender norms, how religious women impact Chinese society and culture, and what the construction of "China" as a cultural identity and as a nation-state has to do with women, gender, and religion. We will also think about what assumptions we have when speaking of gender, religion, and China, and the infinite possibilities when we strive to think beyond. We will read three kinds of materials: (1) scholarship on gender and religion in historical and contemporary China as well as the Chinese-speaking world, (2) scholarship concerning theories and methodology of gender and religious studies not necessarily focused on China, and (3) historical record of religious women in English translation.

Not Offered Every Year

Also Offered As: EALC 7425

1 Course Unit

RELS 7524 Daoist Traditions

This course examines the history of various intellectual and religious traditions that came to be known as Daoist (or Taoist in the Wade-Giles Romanization). We will begin with a critical review of the twentieth-century reinvention of Daoism and the new classification of religious versus philosophical Daoism, before tracing chronologically the textual, institutional, and social history of Daoist traditions from the fourth century B.C.E. While familiarizing students with the key concepts, practices, and organizations developed in the history of Daoism, this class emphasizes the specific socio-political context of each of them. Throughout the course, we will think critically about the labeling of Daoist (as well as Confucian and Buddhist) in Chinese history and in modern scholarship. We will also question modern demarcations between philosophy, religion, and science, as well as that between the spiritual and the physical.

Not Offered Every Year

Also Offered As: EALC 7524

1 Course Unit

RELS 7537 Asian Religions in the Global Imagination

This seminar critically examines the missionary impulses, colonial exploits, and translation endeavors that contributed to the rise of Asian studies and the emergence of the scholarly notion of "Asian religions." It shows the crucial roles played by Asian agents and their European counterparts in the formation of modern conceptions of "religion"; it also engages reflexive questions regarding theory, method, and the geopolitical underpinnings of both Asian studies and the non-confessional academic study of religion. Students will conduct sustained research projects on the country or region of their choice.

Not Offered Every Year

Also Offered As: EALC 7537

1 Course Unit

RELS 7710 Readings Pali Buddhism

This course is an intensive reading course in Pali literature from South and Southeast Asia. Students who wish to take the course must have at least 3 years of Sanskrit and a knowledge of at least one Southeast Asian language. Reading will be in philosophical, narrative, magical, medical, historical, and ritual texts.

1 Course Unit

RELS 7720 Islam, Gender, and Colonialism

In the latter 19th and early 20th centuries South Asians became increasingly concerned with women's education and other social issues related to gender. Following the fall of the Mughal Empire in 1857, the class of urban gentry previously associated with government service and land ownership struggled to shore up the boundaries of their communities. For Muslims particularly, as the place of religion was pushed from the public to the private sphere, the middle class sought to ground itself in a discussion of what constituted proper female behavior. Influenced by the advent of the Victorian purity text in the same period, Indian authors (primarily male) began to weigh in on female propriety. Nazir Ahmed is the most prominent author of 19th century Urdu purity texts, which sought to demonstrate praiseworthy female behavior. Students will have a chance to look at theoretical texts related to gender, as well as read primary sources of influential purity texts written by Nazir Ahmed and Ashraf 'Ali Thanawi. Playful and subversive fictional accounts challenged some of these reformist mores. Newspaper accounts contemporary to the period will also provide context on the gender debate. Male norms of comportment were equally crucial in the debate regarding gender boundaries – our discussion of purity texts will include the importance of male behavior, and the pleasure of transgression associated with crossing gender boundaries.

Spring, even numbered years only

1 Course Unit

RELS 7730 Southeast Asian Manuscript Traditions

This is an advanced PhD seminar in which the students will need advanced proficiency in Pali and at least one Southeast Asian Language (Burmese, Thai, Khmer, Lao, Leu, Khmer, Shan, and/or Lanna). Original manuscripts from Penn's collection of Southeast Asian religious, medical, botanical, historical, art, and literary archives will be examined and discussed.

Not Offered Every Year

Also Offered As: EALC 7590, SAST 7730

1 Course Unit

RELS 9999 Independent Study

Students arrange with a faculty member to pursue a program of reading and writing on a suitable topic.

Fall or Spring

1 Course Unit