

# RELIGIOUS STUDIES (RELS)

## RELS 002 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"?

For BA Students: History and Tradition Sector

Taught by: Durmaz

One-term course offered either term

Also Offered As: JWST 122

Activity: Lecture

1.0 Course Unit

## RELS 004 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.

Taught by: Muravchick

One-term course offered either term

Activity: Lecture

1.0 Course Unit

## RELS 005 Gender, Sexuality, & Religion

What does it mean to be a gendered individual in a Muslim, Hindu, Jewish, Christian, Buddhist, or Sikh 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. The first 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 emphasizes religious traditions 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 emphasize both historical perspectives and contemporary contexts. 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.

For BA Students: Humanities and Social Science S

Taught by: Robb

Course usually offered in fall term

Also Offered As: FOLK 029, GSWS 109

Activity: Lecture

1.0 Course Unit

## RELS 013 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.

For BA Students: Humanities and Social Science S

Taught by: McDaniel

Course usually offered in fall term

Also Offered As: EALC 022

Activity: Lecture

1.0 Course Unit

## RELS 014 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 focussing 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 Hurrians, 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.

For BA Students: History and Tradition Sector

Taught by: Frame

Course usually offered in spring term

Also Offered As: ANCH 046, NELC 046

Activity: Lecture

1.0 Course Unit

**RELS 027 Great Books of Judaism (Fall 2018: Lifecycle in the Talmud)**

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.

For BA Students: Arts and Letters Sector

Taught by: Gross

Course usually offered in fall term

Also Offered As: JWST 151, NELC 156, NELC 456

Activity: Seminar

1.0 Course Unit

**RELS 030 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.

Taught by: Tavor

Activity: Seminar

1.0 Course Unit

**RELS 031 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 space is 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 of 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?

Activity: Seminar

1.0 Course Unit

**RELS 033 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 Freshman 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.

Taught by: Matter

Activity: Seminar

1.0 Course Unit

**RELS 066 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.

For BA Students: Arts and Letters Sector

Taught by: Patel

One-term course offered either term

Also Offered As: COML 006, SAST 006

Activity: Lecture

1.0 Course Unit

**RELS 068 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.

For BA Students: Humanities and Social Science S

Taught by: Sreenivasan

Course not offered every year

Also Offered As: HIST 085, SAST 008

Activity: Lecture

0.0 Course Units

**RELS 069 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?

Taught by: Jamal Elias

Course usually offered in spring term

Also Offered As: SAST 147

Activity: Lecture

1.0 Course Unit

**RELS 079 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.

For BA Students: Arts and Letters Sector

Taught by: Thomas

Course usually offered in fall term

Also Offered As: EALC 079

Activity: Lecture

1.0 Course Unit

**RELS 101 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.

Taught by: Schaefer

One-term course offered either term

Activity: Lecture

1.0 Course Unit

**RELS 102 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.

Taught by: Schaefer

One-term course offered either term

Also Offered As: ANTH 112, ARTH 339

Activity: Seminar

1.0 Course Unit

**RELS 105 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.

Taught by: Durmaz

Course not offered every year

Activity: Lecture

1.0 Course Unit

**RELS 109 Witchcraft and Possession**

This course explores world witchcraft and possession from the persecutions of the early seventeenth century through the rise of Wicca in the twentieth century. The mere mention of these terms, or of such close cousins as demonology, sorcery, exorcism, magic, and the witches Sabbath, raises clear ethnographic and historical challenges. How can the analysis of witchcraft-- including beliefs, patterns of accusation, the general social position of victims, the intensity and timing of witch hunts, and its relation to religious practice, law, language, gender, social marginalization, and property--lead us to a more humane understanding of belief and action? Films such as *The Exorcist*, *The Blair Witch Project*, *The Crucible*, and *Three Sovereigns for Sarah* will focus discussion.

For BA Students: Humanities and Social Science S

Taught by: St. George

One-term course offered either term

Also Offered As: ANTH 118, GSWS 119, HIST 118

Activity: Recitation

1.0 Course Unit

**RELS 110 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.

Taught by: Butler

Course not offered every year

Also Offered As: AFRC 109

Activity: Seminar

1.0 Course Unit

**RELS 111 God & 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.

Taught by: Butler

One-term course offered either term

Activity: Lecture

1.0 Course Unit

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**RELS 112 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.

Taught by: Butler

One-term course offered either term

Also Offered As: AFRC 115

Activity: Lecture

1.0 Course Unit

**RELS 114 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.

Taught by: Silverman/Wegner

Course not offered every year

Also Offered As: NELC 166, NELC 468

Activity: Lecture

1.0 Course Unit

**RELS 117 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 Santeria and Rastafarianism. Special attention will be paid to the role of race, gender, sexuality, and popular culture in the African American religious experience.

Taught by: Butler

One-term course offered either term

Also Offered As: AFRC 117

Activity: Lecture

1.0 Course Unit

**RELS 118 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 South Asian language is needed for this course however.

Taught by: Soneji

Course not offered every year

Also Offered As: CIMS 113, SAST 112

Activity: Lecture

1.0 Course Unit

**RELS 120 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.

For BA Students: History and Tradition Sector

Taught by: Dohrmann

Course usually offered in spring term

Also Offered As: HIST 139, JWST 156, NELC 051, NELC 451

Activity: Lecture

1.0 Course Unit

**RELS 121 Medieval and Early Modern Jewry**

Follow the journey of one global diaspora over a millennium of cultural, intellectual, social, and religious change. From the rise of Islam in the seventh century to the separation of church and state in the seventeenth, Jewish people were intimate parts of, and at the same time utterly othered by, the many societies in which they lived. This basic duality is at the heart of this course, exploring how Jewish religion and culture evolved in relationship with Muslim and Christian majorities. Students will develop an understanding of the rich dynamism of premodern Judaism and Jewish life, with an emphasis on global diversity and internal differentiation as well as change over time. We will look for threads of continuity and moments of transformation, decode illustrative texts, images, and documents (in English), and ask how the Judaism that faced modernity had been shaped by a staggering array of different cultural circumstances after antiquity. The course includes attention to anti-Jewish phenomena like expulsion and blood libel, but also at coexistence and creative cultural synthesis, avoiding any simplistic narrative and asking about their legacy in the present day. It will look at the Jewish past from the inside, including less familiar dimensions including philosophy, magic, messianism, and family life.

For BA Students: History and Tradition Sector

Taught by: Oravetz Albert

Course usually offered in fall term

Also Offered As: HIST 140, JWST 157, NELC 052

Activity: Lecture

1.0 Course Unit

**RELS 122 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, Zionism, the Holocaust, and the emergence of new Jewish communities in Israel and the United States. No prior background in Jewish history is expected.

For BA Students: History and Tradition Sector

Taught by: Wenger

Course usually offered in spring term

Also Offered As: HIST 141, JWST 158, NELC 053

Activity: Lecture

1.0 Course Unit

**RELS 124 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.

Taught by: Wenger

One-term course offered either term

Also Offered As: HIST 150, JWST 130

Activity: Lecture

1.0 Course Unit

**RELS 126 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.

For BA Students: Arts and Letters Sector

Taught by: Fishman

Course not offered every year

Also Offered As: JWST 126, NELC 186

Activity: Lecture

1.0 Course Unit

**RELS 127 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 survey various intersections of religion, gender and politics in Israel today, investigating how religion shapes gender relations, and is shaped in turn by gender.

Taught by: Ben Lulu

Also Offered As: JWST 127

Activity: Seminar

1.0 Course Unit

**RELS 128 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.

Taught by: Ben Lulu

Course offered fall; even-numbered years

Also Offered As: JWST 128

Activity: Lecture

1.0 Course Unit

**RELS 129 Themes Jewish Tradition**

Course topics will vary; 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.

For BA Students: History and Tradition Sector

Taught by: Ben-Amos/Stern/Dohrmann/Fishman

One-term course offered either term

Also Offered As: FOLK 252, JWST 100, NELC 252, NELC 552

Activity: Seminar

1.0 Course Unit

**RELS 130 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.

Taught by: WEITZMAN

Also Offered As: JWST 131, NELC 153

Activity: Seminar

1.0 Course Unit

**RELS 132 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 did so many people come to believe that there was only one god, and how is that god different from earlier gods? How is the God of Judaism different from that venerated by Christians and Muslims. And what is the future of God in a world shaped by secularism, capitalism, and climate-change? This course will address these and other questions in light of anthropology, psychology, intellectual history, and other approaches that scholars use to illumine religion.

Taught by: Weitzman

Course not offered every year

Also Offered As: ANCH 133, JWST 132

Activity: Seminar

1.0 Course Unit

**RELS 135 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.

For BA Students: History and Tradition Sector

Taught by: Reed

One-term course offered either term

Activity: Lecture

1.0 Course Unit

**RELS 136 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.

One-term course offered either term

Also Offered As: JWST 136

Activity: Lecture

1.0 Course Unit

**RELS 137 Religion and the Global Future**

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.

Taught by: Weitzman, Harf

Course usually offered in spring term

Activity: Seminar

1.0 Course Unit

**RELS 143 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.

Taught by: Elias

One-term course offered either term

Also Offered As: NELC 136, SAST 139

Activity: Lecture

1.0 Course Unit

**RELS 144 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.

Taught by: Durmaz

Course not offered every year

Activity: Lecture

1.0 Course Unit

**RELS 150 Introduction to the Bible (The "Old Testament")**

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.

For BA Students: Humanities and Social Science S

Taught by: Cranz

Course usually offered in fall term

Also Offered As: JWST 150, NELC 150, NELC 450

Activity: Lecture

1.0 Course Unit

**RELS 155 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 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 C.E.) but we will also supplement our study of these materials with contemporary or relatively recent philosophical writings in modern India.

For BA Students: History and Tradition Sector

Taught by: Patel

One-term course offered either term

Also Offered As: PHIL 050, SAST 050, SAST 603

Activity: Lecture

1.0 Course Unit

**RELS 163 Introduction to Hinduism**

This course introduces students to the history, texts, philosophies and rituals of South Asia's oldest living religious traditions, represented today by the term "Hinduism." At the same time, it problematizes the idea of a monolithic "Hindu Tradition," in favor of an approach that recognizes several distinct, dynamic, yet symbiotic Hindu religious cultures. The course also places emphasis on the vitality of today's Hinduism(s), and the various historical, ritual, cultural, and social contexts that they represent and constitute. The course is organized around six modules: (1) Issues in the Academic Study of Hinduism; (2) Sanskrit (textual) tradition; (3) Philosophy; (4) Theology; (5) Ritual; (6) Modernity and Contemporary Politics.

Taught by: Soneji

One-term course offered either term

Also Offered As: SAST 009

Activity: Lecture

1.0 Course Unit

**RELS 164 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.

For BA Students: History and Tradition Sector

Taught by: Ali

One-term course offered either term

Also Offered As: HIST 086, SAST 003

Activity: Lecture

1.0 Course Unit

**RELS 165 The Making of Scripture: From Revelation to Canon**

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.

Taught by: Gross

Also Offered As: JWST 160, NELC 160

Activity: Seminar

1.0 Course Unit

**RELS 172 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.

Taught by: Tavor

Course usually offered in fall term

Also Offered As: EALC 008

Activity: Lecture

1.0 Course Unit

**RELS 173 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.

Taught by: McDaniel

One-term course offered either term

Also Offered As: EALC 015, SAST 142

Activity: Lecture

1.0 Course Unit

**RELS 184 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.

Taught by: Cheng

Course not offered every year

Also Offered As: EALC 034

Activity: Lecture

1.0 Course Unit



**RELS 189 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.

Taught by: Sevea

Course not offered every year

Also Offered As: SAST 189, SAST 589

Activity: Seminar

1.0 Course Unit

**RELS 199 Independent Study**

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

One-term course offered either term

Activity: Independent Study

1.0 Course Unit

**RELS 207 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.

Taught by: Weitzman

Course not offered every year

Also Offered As: JWST 207

Activity: Seminar

1.0 Course Unit

**RELS 211 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.

Taught by: Covey

Course not offered every year

Also Offered As: ANTH 211, ENVS 211

Activity: Lecture

1.0 Course Unit

**RELS 212 Animals & 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?

Taught by: Covey

Course not offered every year

Also Offered As: ANTH 212, ENVS 212

Activity: Seminar

1.0 Course Unit

**RELS 215 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?

For BA Students: Humanities and Social Science S

Taught by: Durmaz

One-term course offered either term

Activity: Lecture

1.0 Course Unit

**RELS 218 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 Yury 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).

For BA Students: Arts and Letters Sector

Taught by: Verkholantsev

Course not offered every year

Also Offered As: COML 213, REES 213

Activity: Seminar

1.0 Course Unit

**RELS 219 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.

Taught by: Esmaeili

One-term course offered either term

Also Offered As: CIMS 218, GSWS 218, NELC 218, NELC 518

Activity: Seminar

1.0 Course Unit

**RELS 224 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."

Taught by: Cranz

One-term course offered either term

Also Offered As: COML 380, JWST 255, NELC 250, NELC 550

Activity: Seminar

1.0 Course Unit

**RELS 227 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.

Taught by: Ben Lulu

Course not offered every year

Activity: Lecture

1.0 Course Unit

**RELS 233 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.

Taught by: Cheng

Course not offered every year

Also Offered As: EALC 234, EALC 634, RELS 634

Activity: Seminar

1.0 Course Unit

**RELS 235 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, Mesopotamian magic bowls, the so-called "Jesus Sutras," and the Quran.

Taught by: Durmaz

Course not offered every year

Also Offered As: NELC 385, SAST 245

Activity: Lecture

1.0 Course Unit

**RELS 237 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.

Taught by: Cheng

Course usually offered in spring term

Also Offered As: EALC 230, EALC 630, GSWS 234, GSWS 630, RELS 630

Activity: Seminar

1.0 Course Unit

**RELS 239 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.

Taught by: Leja

Course not offered every year

Activity: Seminar

1.0 Course Unit

**RELS 244 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.

Taught by: Steve Weitzman

Also Offered As: JWST 244

Activity: Lecture

1.0 Course Unit

**RELS 245 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.

Taught by: Harris

Course usually offered in spring term

Activity: Seminar

1.0 Course Unit

**RELS 246 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.

Taught by: Timothy Powell

Course not offered every year

Also Offered As: ENGL 246, ENVS 246

Activity: Seminar

1.0 Course Unit

**RELS 248 Introduction to Islamic Law**

This course will introduce students to classical Islamic law, the all-embracing sacred law of Islam. Among the world's various legal systems, Islamic law may be the most widely misunderstood and even misrepresented; certainly, misconceptions about it abound. Islamic law is, however, the amazing product of a rich, fascinating and diverse cultural and intellectual tradition. Most of the readings in this course will be taken from primary sources in translation. Areas covered will include criminal law, family law, law in the Quran, gender and sexuality, the modern application of Islamic law, Islamic government and other selected topics.

Taught by: Lowry

Course usually offered in fall term

Also Offered As: NELC 238

Activity: Lecture

1.0 Course Unit

**RELS 249 Re-enchanting Modernity: A Guide to Sufism in South Asia**

This undergraduate level course introduces students to Sufism in modern South Asia, with a particular focus on how Muslim 'mystics' and their 'mystical' methods interacted with modernity, colonialism, technological developments and globalization. This course is divided into three parts. In the first part of this course, students are provided with an overview of the theological and historical background of the dominant expression of Islam that came to be identified as 'Sufism' or 'Islamic mysticism', the historical development of Sufi institutions and spaces in South Asia, and the historical emergence of South Asia as a prominent global center of Sufism. The second and main part of this course introduces students to a range of anthropological and historical works that are revelatory about how Sufi in modern South Asia were and remain intimately connected to modern political and technological developments. Providing students with an overview of Sufi re-enchantments of modernity from the 19th to 21st century, this section of the course focuses upon Sufi movements and masters who perpetuated or defended customary Islam through sophisticated appropriations of technologies and print networks, and negotiations with non-Muslim rulers and societies. Moreover, students will be introduced to anthropological and historical scholarship on religious worlds in modern South Asia that were and remain steeped in 'customary Islam' and Sufi performances and interpretations of Islam. These sources reveal how 'mystical' methods of performing Islam through ecstasy and spiritual restoration, and interpretations of dreams and visions, have regularly interacted with contemporaneous technologies. The third part of this course introduces students to the globalization of South Asian Sufism in North America, Europe and Southeast Asia. Herein, students will be encouraged to engage with anthropological and literary works pertaining to itinerant South Asian Sufi masters and their devotional cults, and introduced to active South Asian Sufi centers in Philadelphia.

Taught by: Sevea

One-term course offered either term

Also Offered As: SAST 249

Activity: Seminar

1.0 Course Unit

**RELS 251 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.

Taught by: Sreenivasan

Also Offered As: SAST 250

Activity: Lecture

1.0 Course Unit

**RELS 254 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." Previous courses in RELS or ANTH recommended.

Taught by: Thomas

Course usually offered in spring term

Also Offered As: ANTH 253

Activity: Seminar

1.0 Course Unit

**RELS 256 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. Permission needed from instructor to enroll.

Taught by: McDaniel

Activity: Seminar

1.0 Course Unit

**RELS 259 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.

For BA Students: Arts and Letters Sector

Taught by: Weitzman

Also Offered As: JWST 249

Activity: Seminar

1.0 Course Unit

**RELS 261 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.

Taught by: Gross

Also Offered As: ANCH 261, NELC 261, NELC 561

Activity: Lecture

1.0 Course Unit

**RELS 270 Topics in East Asian Religions**

This course examines the relationship between religious institutions and the state in East Asia. Focusing on China and Japan, 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 transnational approach, we will examine the impact of Asian religious traditions: Confucianism, Daoism, Buddhism, and Shinto, as well as global religions such as Islam and Christianity, on the states and their role in shaping power relations on the international level.

Taught by: Tavor

Course not offered every year

Also Offered As: EALC 038

Activity: Lecture

1.0 Course Unit

**RELS 271 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.

Taught by: Jolyon Thomas

Course usually offered in spring term

Also Offered As: EALC 253, EALC 653, RELS 671

Activity: Seminar

1.0 Course Unit

**RELS 273 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.

Taught by: McDaniel

Also Offered As: EALC 036

Activity: Seminar

1.0 Course Unit

**RELS 288 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.

For BA Students: History and Tradition Sector

Taught by: Amponsah

Also Offered As: AFRC 287, HIST 287

Activity: Lecture

1.0 Course Unit

**RELS 303 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.

Taught by: Wilker and Dohrmann

Course not offered every year

Also Offered As: ANCH 303, CLST 338, JWST 303

Activity: Seminar

1.0 Course Unit

**RELS 309 Honors Thesis Seminar**

Required of honors majors who choose the research option.

Course usually offered in spring term

Activity: Independent Study

1.0 Course Unit

**RELS 311 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. This class is intended for juniors, seniors, and graduate students.

Taught by: Sharkey

Course not offered every year

Also Offered As: HIST 479, JWST 335, NELC 335, NELC 535

Activity: Seminar

1.0 Course Unit

**RELS 320 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.

Taught by: Ruderman

One-term course offered either term

Also Offered As: HIST 380, JWST 380

Activity: Lecture

3.0 Course Units

**RELS 333 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.

Taught by: Drpic, Durmaz

Also Offered As: ARTH 333

Activity: Seminar

1.0 Course Unit

**RELS 356 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. Prerequisite: Students must complete an interview with instructor before acquiring a permit. 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.

Taught by: McDaniel

Course not offered every year

Activity: Seminar

1.0 Course Unit

**RELS 399 Directed Reading**

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

One-term course offered either term

Activity: Independent Study

1.0 Course Unit

**RELS 401 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.

Taught by: Tycz

Course not offered every year

Also Offered As: ARTH 410

Activity: Seminar

1.0 Course Unit

**RELS 414 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.

Taught by: Ben Sasson

Course not offered every year

Also Offered As: JWST 413

Activity: Seminar

1.0 Course Unit

**RELS 434 Christian Thought From 1000-1800**

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.

Taught by: Matter

Course not offered every year

Activity: Seminar

1.0 Course Unit

**RELS 438 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.

Taught by: Treat

One-term course offered either term

Activity: Seminar

1.0 Course Unit

**RELS 439 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.

Taught by: Lamas

Course usually offered in spring term

Also Offered As: AFRC 405, URBS 405

Activity: Seminar

1.0 Course Unit

**RELS 471 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.

Taught by: Justin McDaniel

Activity: Seminar

1.0 Course Unit

**RELS 498 Advanced Research Project**

One-term course offered either term

Activity: Independent Study

1.0 Course Unit

**RELS 499 Culminating Experience**

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

Activity: Independent Study

1.0 Course Unit

**RELS 500 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.

Taught by: Schaefer

Course not offered every year

Activity: Seminar

1.0 Course Unit



**RELS 501 Topics in the Study of Religion**

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

Taught by: Butler

Course not offered every year

Also Offered As: AFRC 547

Activity: Seminar

1.0 Course Unit

**RELS 505 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.

Taught by: Schaefer

Course usually offered in spring term

Also Offered As: CIMS 506

Activity: Seminar

1.0 Course Unit

**RELS 509 Teaching Religion**

The aim of this course is to help graduate students from within and beyond the field of Religious Studies develop their ability to teach about religion in a secular academic setting. The course has a practical dimension as a chance to develop one's teaching skills but it also aims to explore theoretical questions in the study of religion that come into focus when one has to help others learn about it.

Taught by: Weitzman

Course usually offered in fall term

Activity: Seminar

1.0 Course Unit

**RELS 510 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.

Taught by: Butler

Course not offered every year

Activity: Seminar

1.0 Course Unit

**RELS 515 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.

Taught by: Durmaz

One-term course offered either term

Activity: Seminar

1.0 Course Unit

**RELS 517 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 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.

Taught by: Butler

Course not offered every year

Also Offered As: AFRC 518

Activity: Seminar

1.0 Course Unit

**RELS 520 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.

Taught by: Fishman

Course not offered every year

Also Offered As: JWST 320, JWST 520, NELC 454

Activity: Seminar

1.0 Course Unit

**RELS 523 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 Geonics, 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.

Taught by: Fishman

Course usually offered in fall term

Also Offered As: HEBR 583, JWST 523

Activity: Seminar

1.0 Course Unit

**RELS 541 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.

Taught by: Jamal Elias

Course not offered every year

Also Offered As: NELC 589, SAST 541

Activity: Seminar

1.0 Course Unit

**RELS 545 Sufi Thought & 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.

Taught by: Elias

Course not offered every year

Activity: Seminar

1.0 Course Unit

**RELS 551 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.

Taught by: Ali

Also Offered As: SAST 550

Activity: Seminar

1.0 Course Unit

**RELS 552 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.

Taught by: Schaefer

Also Offered As: COML 555, GSWS 554

Activity: Seminar

1.0 Course Unit

**RELS 571 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 objects 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.

Taught by: McDaniel

Course not offered every year

Also Offered As: ARTH 510, EALC 718

Activity: Seminar

1.0 Course Unit

**RELS 586 History of Islam in Asia**

This class is designed to structure reflection on Islam and Islamic culture in South Asia— Indonesia, Pakistan, India, and Bangladesh. Contrary to the popular perception that the Middle East defines Islam, Asian countries not only host the most Muslims in the world but have been the source of some of Islam's most important social and reform movements in the last three hundred years. This class looks at the history of Muslim societies across Asia not just as a religious community but also as a social and cultural bloc (a distinctive part of what Marshall Hodgson called the 'Islamicate' world, but also an area that challenges some of Hodgson's assumptions about the Islamicate world). This course allows for the study of the Muslim world between the years 1700 to present. The class will allow students to compare and contrast Muslim societies over the last three centuries, examine points of confluence for geographically- or culturally- distinct Muslim peoples in the last three centuries, and in their writing assignments focus on the history of one society in a wider Islamicate context. In the process students will gain a more nuanced awareness of how Islam has made an impact in Asian countries, and how Asian countries have in turn impacted Islam.

Taught by: Robb

One-term course offered either term

Also Offered As: SAST 686

Activity: Seminar

1.0 Course Unit

**RELS 608 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.

Taught by: Grey & Durmaz

Course not offered every year

Also Offered As: ANCH 608, NELC 608

Activity: Seminar

1.0 Course Unit

**RELS 630 Gender, Religion, and China**

This course examines gender in Chinese religious culture from ancient to contemporary times. We will explore topics including the Buddhist accommodation of Chinese family system, Chinese transformation of the bodhisattva Guanyin, female deities in Daoist and popular religious pantheons, writings about religious women, female ghosts and fox spirits in literary imagination and folk tales, and the significance of yin force in Chinese medicine and Daoist alchemy. Through the case of China, we will look at how gender plays critical and constitutive roles in religious traditions, and how religion can be used both to reinforce and to challenge gender norms.

Taught by: Cheng, H

Course not offered every year

Also Offered As: EALC 230, EALC 630, GSWs 234, GSWs 630, RELS 237

Activity: Seminar

1.0 Course Unit

**RELS 632 Hinduism & 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.

One-term course offered either term

Also Offered As: SAST 632

Activity: Seminar

1.0 Course Unit

**RELS 644 Religion in Modern South Asia**

Taught by: Soneji

Course not offered every year

Also Offered As: SAST 645

Activity: Seminar

1.0 Course Unit

**RELS 658 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.

Course not offered every year

Also Offered As: EALC 257, EALC 657, RELS 258

Activity: Seminar

1.0 Course Unit

**RELS 671 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 oppressive political ideology linked to the emperor system, an environmentalist ethic, or some combination of these. This course investigates the multifarious types of Shinto envisioned by these competing interest groups.

Taught by: Thomas, J.

Course usually offered in spring term

Also Offered As: EALC 253, EALC 653, RELS 271

Activity: Seminar

1.0 Course Unit

**RELS 701 Readings in African American Religion History**

Traditional narratives of African American Religion go from slavery to civil rights to "freedom" without taking into account the complex religious lives and intellectual production of people of African descent in the Americas. This course will focus on African American Religion and the historical and theoretical frameworks that have shaped the study of this field. Readings will cover religious studies, anthropology, history, and African American studies in order to provide an understanding of the varieties of religion and religious experiences with this particular segment of the African Diaspora.

Taught by: Butler

Course not offered every year

Also Offered As: AFRC 701

Activity: Seminar

1.0 Course Unit

**RELS 702 Topics in Medieval Art**

Topics vary from semester to semester. For the Fall 2021 semester, the topic will be: Medieval Art Now. How has the field of medieval art history, here understood in the ecumenical sense to include the Byzantine and Islamicate worlds, changed since the 1990s and the methodological reorientations brought about by the so-called "new art history"? Indeed, what is happening in medieval art now? This graduate seminar will introduce students to the key developments and theoretical interventions that have shaped the field over the past twenty years. Topics will include: vision and visuality; materiality; thing theory; phenomenology; art's intersection with science; ecocriticism; the global turn; critical race theory; and the rise of the digital humanities. By critically engaging with some of the most invigorating recent scholarship, we will reflect on the state of medieval art history and consider what its future might or should look like.

Taught by: Guerin

Course not offered every year

Also Offered As: AAMW 740, ARTH 740

Activity: Seminar

1.0 Course Unit

**RELS 742 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. Prerequisite: A reading knowledge Arabic required.

Taught by: Elias

Course not offered every year

Also Offered As: NELC 782

Activity: Seminar

1.0 Course Unit

**RELS 771 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.

Taught by: Justin McDaniel

Activity: Seminar

1.0 Course Unit

**RELS 773 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, Khoen, 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.

Taught by: McDaniel

Course not offered every year

Also Offered As: EALC 705, SAST 674

Activity: Seminar

1.0 Course Unit

**RELS 999 Independent Study**

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

One-term course offered either term

Activity: Independent Study

1.0 Course Unit