RELIGIOUS STUDIES (RELS)

RELS 001 Religions of Asia
Summer 2012 Description: This course is an introduction to the religious traditions of Southern and Eastern Asia. It surveys the beliefs, rituals, and thought of major traditions-Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism, Taoism, and less well known traditions-Jainism, Zoroastrianism, Sikhism, Shintoism. The focus of the course will be on the lived experience of each tradition, looking at the worldviews, motives and aspirations of religious figures. Further, we will trace historical developments by examining moments of sharing and contestation of religious, political, and social ideas between traditions in order to question their boundaries and integrity. Special emphasis is placed on the role of the visual in each religious culture. As religions often do not draw the same boundaries between the sacred and profane as western traditions do, we will also interrogate the ways we approach the study of religion and problematize the very study of “Asian Religions” and “World Religions” in general. This course seeks to foster effective skills and to promote critical and independent inquiry into the ways the sacred has been and continues to be made, and how the vicissitudes of life are made meaningful in Asia.
For BA Students: History and Tradition Sector
Taught by: Vose
One-term course offered either term
Also Offered As: EALC 004
Activity: Lecture
1 Course Unit

RELS 002 Religions of the West
This course surveys some of the core beliefs and practices within Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. To do so, we will focus on history and memory, exploring how key figures and formative events from the past have been made present, from generation to generation, through scripture, ritual, liturgy, and remembrance. Special attention will be given to points of interaction between Jews, Christians, and Muslims, as well as to the impact of their intertwined histories on the formation and development of Western cultures. Fulfills History & Tradition Sector.
For BA Students: History and Tradition Sector
Taught by: Reed
One-term course offered either term
Also Offered As: JWST 122
Activity: Lecture
1 Course Unit

RELS 003 Religion and Literature
A consideration of how great works of literature from different cultural traditions have reclaimed and reinterpreted compelling religious themes. The focus this semester will be on themes of creation, especially the creation of human beings, from ancient myths of different cultures to modern science fiction. This course fulfills the General Requirement in Sector 3, Arts and Letters.
For BA Students: Arts and Letters Sector
Taught by: Matter
One-term course offered either term
Also Offered As: COML 242
Activity: Lecture
1 Course Unit
Notes: Theme of the course will change from term to term. See syllabus for more info.

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 will be explored along with examples from other traditions.
Taught by: Muravchick
One-term course offered either term
Activity: Lecture
1 Course Unit

RELS 005 Women and Religion
This course looks at the contrast between the model of the virtuous woman, and the instructive power of the uncontrollable woman, from 1800 to present in Hinduism, Christianity, and Islam. Drawing examples from a variety of historical contexts and traditions, this course will touch on issues of religious empowerment, piety, leadership, and theoretical questions involving gender, spirituality, the body and the intersection of class status and religious performance.
For BA Students: Humanities and Social Science Sector
Taught by: Robb
One-term course offered either term
Also Offered As: GSWS 109
Activity: Lecture
1 Course Unit

RELS 007 Introduction to Africana Studies
The aim of this course is to provide an interdisciplinary examination of the complex array of African American and other African Diaspora social practices and experiences. This class will focus on both classic texts and modern works that provide an introduction to the dynamics of African American and African Diaspora thought and practice. Topics include: What is Afro-American Studies?: The History Before 1492; Creating the African Diaspora After 1500; The Challenge of Freedom; Race, Gender and Class in the 20th Century; From Black Studies to Africana Studies: The Future of Afro-American Studies.
For BA Students: Humanities and Social Science Sector
One-term course offered either term
Also Offered As: AFRC 001
Activity: Lecture
1 Course Unit
RELS 010 Religion in Public Life
This seminar is an introduction to several aspects of the hotly debated relation between religion and public life in America. In the first half of the course we will study two books by law professors, one Jewish and the other Christian. Their debate will introduce us to the legal and historical background, and to the continuing challenges of church-state separation in America. The second half of the course will examine the claim that we now live in a “new religious America,” one in which the increasing presence of Hindus, Buddhists and Muslims has created a new pluralism and a new set of challenges. We will then consider the argument of one historian that diversity and difference have characterized religious groups in America since at least the 19th century, and that this has resulted in a number of paradoxical social situations. Finally, we will close with a brief look at the claim that there exists in America a “civil religion,” one that unites all citizens despite their other religious differences. 
One-term course offered either term
Activity: Seminar
1 Course Unit

RELS 012 Introduction to Religion
This course is an introduction to the study of religion as an academic discipline. We will consider issues such as the role of religion in human societies, how religion addresses perennial questions of life and death, and how religious traditions change, evolve, and influence one another. Although this is NOT a primarily an introduction to different religious traditions in sense of a “world religions” survey course, students will become acquainted with major teachings of several faith traditions.
Our focus, though, will be the big questions: Does religion do more good than harm or is it the other way around? Has the modern emergence of a more secular worldview been an improvement or a diminishment? Can we know or experience who or what “ultimaterality” is, or is “it” really beyond us? How can we explain the relationship religion, peace, and violence? Is suffering and meaningless so pervasive that no traditional concept of a loving and powerful God can be affirmed credibly? What kinds of provocative and perhaps enduring answers have people given to these questions in the past? Has something changed as we’ve moved from ancient to modern times in terms of our own worldviews, so that the ways people used to think about God must be radically revised if not abandoned entirely? or are there ways for modern women and men to become or remain religious without ceasing to be modern?
The goals of this freshman seminar include: 1. an enhanced working knowledge of some significant elements of religion, especially symbol, doctrine, experience, and systems of cosmic, social and order, as they are manifested in several religious traditions. 2. an enhanced capacity to make critical comparisons among religious traditions across time. 3. a greater capacity to analyze and reflect on the meaning of religious beliefs and practices. 4. a greater capacity to read and critically interpret religious and scholarly texts. 5. development of your written and verbal communication skills.
Taught by: Matter
One-term course offered either term
Activity: Seminar
1 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 on 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. It will also introduce students to related humanistic categories such as mythology, literature, symbol, the edge, cosmology, the practice of the supernatural, 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, Prójit Mukharji, Talia 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: Seminar
1 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 focusing on the key issues of concern to humanity: creation, birth, the place of humans in the order of the universe, death and destruction. The course will cover not only the better known cultures from the area, such as Egypt and Mesopotamia, but also some lesser known traditions, such as those of the 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
Activity: Lecture
1 Course Unit
RELS 015 The Bible as Literature
Successive generations have found the Bible to be a text which requires--
even demands--extensive interpretation. This course explores the Bible
as literature, considering such matters as the artistic arrangement and
stylistic qualities of individual episodes as well as the larger thematic
patterns of both the Old and New Testaments and the Apocrypha. A good
part of the course is spent looking at the place of the Bible in cultural and
literary history and the influence of such biblical figures as Adam and Eve,
David, and Susanna on writers of poetry, drama, and fiction in the English
and American literary traditions.
Taught by: Hall
Course not offered every year
Also Offered As: ENGL 033
Activity: Lecture
1 Course Unit

RELS 021 Religion in the African Diaspora
This introductory course examines the practices, beliefs, and deities
within African-based religions in the United States and the Caribbean.
While television shows such as American Horror Story presented African
gods and their worshippers in pejorative ways, this course seeks to dispel
these caricatures. The course will include Cuban Lukumi (Santeria),
Brazilian Candomblé, Haitian Vodou, and other traditional African
Religions in African Diaspora. Special attention will be paid to gender,
racial, and performance, and the growth of these religions in the United
States in immigrant communities and the African American community.
Film clips and YouTube videos will accompany our readings and fuel
our discussion. Course requirements will include regular participation,
readings, short response papers, quizzes, and a final research paper.
Taught by: Battle
Activity: Seminar
1 Course Unit

RELS 024 Archaeology and the Bible
The Hebrew Bible (Tanak) and archaeological research provide distinct,
and at times conflicting, accounts of the origins and development of
ancient Israel and its neighbors. Religion, culture and politics ensures
that such accounts of the past have significant implications for the world
we live in today. In this course we will discuss the latest archaeological
research from Israel, the Palestinian Territories and Jordan as it relates
to the Bible, moving from Creation to the Babylonian Exile. Students will
critically engage the best of both biblical and archaeological scholarship.
Open discussions of the religious, social and political implications of the
material covered will be an important aspect of the course.
Taught by: Zettler
Course not offered every year
Also Offered As: ANTH 124, JWST 124, NELC 155
Activity: Lecture
1 Course Unit

RELS 027 Great Books of Judaism
The Babylonian Talmud (Bavli), a product reflecting the collaborative
effort of generations of sages, is the foundational legal and ethical
document of rabbinic Judaism. Both the methods of interpreting this
text--and their theoretical frameworks have varied dramatically, evolving
creatively throughout the generations. In the past century, theories
of how to read the Talmud and hypothesizes about its formation and
redaction have opened up new avenues for understanding what the text
says and, more importantly, how it works. Through in-depth examination
of demonstrative legal passages, this course will contrast the insights
generated by the major critical schools of the past century and with the
interpretations of selected medieval scholars, the Rishonim. English
translations will be provided alongside the original texts. Previous study
of the Talmud is helpful.
For BA Students: Arts and Letters Sector
Taught by: Carasik
Course usually offered in fall term
Also Offered As: COML 057, JWST 151, NELC 156
Activity: Seminar
1 Course Unit

RELS 028 Religion in America
Activity: Lecture
1 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 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 spaces 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 Course Unit

RELS 033 Mod 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 Course Unit

RELS 057 Study Abroad
Activity: Lecture
1 Course Unit

RELS 086 India: Culture & 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 Course Units

RELS 091 Native American Literature
From oral traditions to Youtube videos of Native American hip hop, this course surveys the diverse body of Native American literature through its many transformations across the centuries. The course will focus primarily on contemporary Native American literature, an era known as the Native American Renaissance. We will read literary works by Black Elk, Leslie Marmon Silko, Sherman Alexie, N. Scott Momaday, and others. The course will also include films such as Smoke Signals and Whale Rider.
Taught by: Powell
Course not offered every year
Also Offered As: ANTH 082, ENGL 082
Activity: Lecture
1 Course Unit

RELS 103 Approaches to the Study of Mysticism
Introduction to "mysticism" as a subject of academic investigation and to selected representations in various religious traditions. Special attention to problems of definition and historical context.
One-term course offered either term
Activity: Seminar
1 Course Unit

RELS 105 Religion and Film
Introduction to different ways in which religion is represented in film. Emphasis upon religious themes, but some attention to cinematic devices and strategies. Although most films studied will deal with only one of the major historical religious traditions (Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, Christianity and Islam), the selection will always include at least two of those traditions.
One-term course offered either term
Activity: Lecture
1 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 Course Unit
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 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 117
Activity: Lecture
1 Course Unit

RELS 113 Major Western Religious Thinkers
Introduction to the writings of one or two significant western religious thinkers, designed for those who have no background in religious thought. Possible thinkers to be studied: Augustine, Maimonides, Spinoza, Luther, Teresa of Avila, Edwards, Mendelssohn, Kierkegaard, DuBois, Bonhoeffer, King.
One-term course offered either term
Also Offered As: GSWS 113, JWST 113
Activity: Lecture
1 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 Course Unit

RELS 116 Science, Magic, and Religion, 1500 to the present.
The Western world once had its share of witches, alchemists, astrologers and magicians. They are thin on the ground these days, only to be replaced by New Age or cult-like movements. This course examines magic as it once was, explores the rise of science in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, looks at Mesmerism and theosophy within the framework of radical political movements culminating in the rise of Fascism, and for twentieth century America explores the nature of post-war Big Science and various anti-science movements. No prerequisites.
For BA Students: History and Tradition Sector
One-term course offered either term
Also Offered As: FOLK 025, HIST 025
Activity: Seminar
1 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 Course Unit

RELS 118 Religion & 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 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 Course Unit

RELS 121 Med and Early Mod Jewry
Exploration of intellectual, social, and cultural developments in Jewish civilization from the rise of Islam in the seventh century to the assault on established conceptions of faith and religious authority in 17th century Europe that is, from the age of Mohammed to that of Spinoza. Particular attention will be paid to the interaction of Jewish culture with those of Christianity and Islam.
For BA Students: History and Tradition Sector
Taught by: Ruderman
Course usually offered in fall term
Also Offered As: HIST 140, JWST 157, NELC 052
Activity: Lecture
1 Course Unit
RELS 122 History of Jewish Civilization: 17th Century to the Present
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 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 Course Unit

RELS 125 Introduction to the Bible (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: Tigay
Course usually offered in fall term
Also Offered As: JWST 150, NELC 150
Activity: Seminar
1 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 Course Unit

RELS 127 Jewish Law and Ethics
An introduction to the literary and legal sources of Jewish law within an historical framework. Emphasis will be placed upon the development and dynamics of Jewish jurisprudence, and the relationship between Jewish law and social ethics.
Course usually offered in fall term
Also Offered As: JWST 152
Activity: Seminar
1 Course Unit

RELS 128 Jews, Judaism, and Modernity
A survey of Jewish thinkers and movements of the modern period focusing on the historical, intellectual, and social foundations of modern Judaism. Through careful reading of primary sources in translation, students will be exposed to seminal writings that respond both to new challenges and the broader issues of religious continuity and discontinuity.
Course not offered every year
Activity: Lecture
1 Course Unit

RELS 129 Themes in the 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: JWST 100, NELC 252, NELC 552
Activity: Seminar
1 Course Unit

RELS 130 How to Read the Bible
While the Bible may be the most read text in the world, it is not clear that anyone understands what it actually means. Secular scholars read the Bible as they would any other ancient document, trying to understand who wrote it and what it reveals about the past, but that is not how the Bible is understood by hundreds of millions of readers who embrace it as a message from God and read its contents not just to learn about the past but to understand what the meaning of life is, how to be a good person, and where the world is headed. How is it that the Bible is read in such different ways by the secular and the religious? Who is right in the struggle over its meaning, and how does one go about deciphering that meaning in the first place?
Taught by: WEITZMAN
Also Offered As: JWST 131, NELC 153
Activity: Seminar
1 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 is the God of the Old Testament different from earlier Near Eastern deities, or different from God as represented in the New Testament and the Quran? When and why did people come to question the existence of God, and how has the idea of God changed in the last century in light of experiences like the Holocaust, social movements like feminism, and the rise of new technologies like the Internet? This course will address these questions as it surveys the approaches scholars have developed to comprehend the history of a being who would seem beyond human comprehension.
Taught by: Wietzman
Also Offered As: ANCH 133, JWST 132
Activity: Seminar
1 Course Unit

RELS 133 An Introduction to Christianity
A survey of the classical Christian Traditions (Orthodoxy, Roman Catholicism, Protestant groups). The basic perspective is phenomenological, but historical and folkloric considerations are also raised. Topics include the symbols of Christian faiths, perspectives on human nature, and views of evil.
Taught by: Matter
One-term course offered either term
Activity: Seminar
1 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 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 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 Course Unit

RELS 142 Islam in South Asian Culture
Islam reached South Asia in the eighth century and Muslim rulers held sway over large parts of the Subcontinent for much of the period from the late 12th century until the colonial period. However, the majority of the population never converted to Islam, and since independence in 1947 Islam--its interpretation, realization, and influence--has been a major factor underlying many difficult political issues. This has been true not only in the largest country, India, where Muslims form 12% (unevenly distributed) of the population, but in Bangladesh and Pakistan where non-Muslims are relatively insignificant minorities. This course explores the realities and the perceptions related to Muslim identities and the Islamic heritage in the subcontinent, and sets it in global context by comparison with other parts of the world which share various aspects of the South Asian experience. The course will conclude with an assessment of the larger significance--social, economic and political, as well as cult ural--of Islam in South Asia today.
Taught by: Spooner
Course not offered every year
Also Offered As: SAST 141
Activity: Lecture
1 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 Course Unit
REL 145 Islamic History and Culture
This course introduces students to the history of Islam as both a religion and as a civilization, from pre-Islamic Arabia to the rise of the gunpowder empires in the 16th century. The course will use key moments, texts, and figures in Islamic history to examine notions of religion, culture, and civilization as they have been understood by Muslims, in a variety of contexts, as well as the problems and politics surrounding the representation of Islamic history and Islam in the contemporary world. Some major topics to be covered include the development of Islamic institutions, the participation of Jews, Christians, and others in Islamic civilization, Arabic and Persian literature, as well as Europeans’ encounters with Islam.
Taught by: Elias
Course not offered every year
Also Offered As: NELC 185, SAST 145
Activity: Lecture
1 Course Unit

REL 149 The Mullah & The Englishman - Islam in Modern South Asia
This course introduces students to Islam in modern South Asia, with a particular focus on the development of 'new' Muslim religious idioms, orientations, pedagogies and movements in 19th and 20th century South Asia. This course is divided into three parts. In the first part of this course, students are provided with an overview of: Muslim institutions and spaces in pre-colonial South Asia, the historical emergence of South Asia as a prominent global center of Islam, and the development of Urdu as an Islamic idiom. The second and main part of this course introduces students to academic literature concerning sophisticated encounters between the Muslim elite in north India and modern political and technological developments. The intimate interactions of the 'Mullah' and the 'Englishman' from the 19th to 20th century will thus be revealed to students. This part focuses upon, on the one hand, the role of Islam and pious Muslims in the colonial army, and on the other hand, Muslim initiatives to educate an Islamic 'modernism', 'traditionalism', 'fundamentalism' and 'Sufism', and appropriate print technologies for the creation of public spheres. Students will be introduced to historical scholarship revelatory of how these Muslim pedagogies and print initiatives were based upon sophisticated transcultural networks and exchange. In the third part of this course, students will be encouraged to engage with contemporary literature on South Asian Muslim political philosophy and nationalism, and the transcultural intellectual exchanges that produced key Muslim political ideologies.
Taught by: Sevea
Course usually offered in fall term
Also Offered As: RELS 549, SAST 502
Activity: Seminar
1 Course Unit

REL 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
Activity: Lecture
1 Course Unit

REL 162 Epic Traditions of India
This course examines various key aspects of the epic traditions of India. The Ramayana and the Mahabhharata are two great Indian epics that have deeply influenced the Indian religious and cultural ethos. The course inspects scholarly studies regarding the multiple renditions of these epics. The students will view folk performances from various regions in India that continue to bring these epics to life. These performances form a significant part of the epic tradition as they connect the stories in the epics with material realities of the Indian religious and cultural life. The course investigates the role played by the two epics, especially the Ramayana, in the Indian political discourse in both the past and the present. Beyond India, their historical birthplace, these epics traveled to South East Asian regions such as Indonesia and Malaysia. We will also consider the ways in which the traditions in these regions are similar or dissimilar to those in India. Lastly, the students will study the role of the media such as television shows, cinema, and comic books in the manifestation of these epics in popular imagination.
One-term course offered either term
Activity: Lecture
1 Course Unit

REL 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: RELS 663, SAST 009
Activity: Lecture
1 Course Unit
RELS 172 East Asian Religions
This course introduces religious traditions in China, Japan, and Taiwan from ancient to contemporary times, with emphases on their sociopolitical contexts, visual and material dimensions, and entanglement with gender, sexuality and the body. We will examine the history of Confucianism, Daoism, Buddhism, Shinto, as well as the practices, thoughts, and institutions that do not fall squarely into those categories. We will pay attention to the relationship between textual and oral traditions, and that between canons, rituals and the popular practices from both historical and anthropological perspectives.
Taught by: Cheng H
Also Offered As: EALC 008
Activity: Lecture
1 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 lay 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 Course Unit

RELS 191 Multicultural American Literature and Spirituality
This course will focus on the Multicultural Renaissance (1980-2000) when literary masterpieces appeared from African American, Native American, Asian American, and Latina/o writers such as Toni Morrison, Leslie Marmon Silko, Maxine Hong Kingston, and Rudolfo Anaya. As these writers were accepted into the canon of “American Literature,” they forced the country to rethink the myth of the Manifest Destiny by updating ancient stories of Buddhism, Native American ceremonies, African religions, brought over on slave ships, and the unique blend of Christianity and indigenous spirituality that animates Mexican American Catholicism. In the 21st century, the Multicultural Renaissance continues, albeit in new forms. Television shows like “Orange is the New Black” and “Ru Paul’s Drag Race” make visible and empower LGBT cultures; “Catfish” explores how cultural identities become ever more fluid in the age of the internet. Stand up comedians Key & Peel, Margaret Cho, and Ahmed Ahmed explore issues of religion, race, ethnicity, sexuality. This course will unfold against the backdrop of the 2016 election, as issues of cultural diversity divide the country, even as it becomes ever more multicultural.
Taught by: Tim Powell
Also Offered As: ENGL 264
Activity: Seminar
1 Course Unit

RELS 199 Independent Study
One-term course offered either term
Activity: Independent Study
1 Course Unit

RELS 203 The Religious Other
Course explores attitudes toward monotheists of other faiths, and claims made about these “religious Others” in real and imagined encounters between Jews, Christians and Muslims from antiquity to the present. Strategies of “othering” will be analyzed through an exploration of claims about the Other’s body, habits and beliefs, as found in works of scripture, law, theology, polemics, art, literature and reportage. Attention will be paid to myths about the other, inter-group violence, converts, cases of cross-cultural influence, notions of toleration, and perceptions of Others in contemporary life. Primary sources will be provided in English.
Taught by: Fishman
Course not offered every year
Also Offered As: COML 205, JWST 213, JWST 213, NELC 383
Activity: Seminar
1 Course Unit
RELS 204 The Graphic Novel and Religious Identities
Graphic novels and comic books express a variety of popular conceptions concerning religion and, as such, are capable of showing us where (and how) religious identities and phenomena exist in modern societies. Viewing comics as material-semiotic objects with multiple origins, audiences, and effects, this course investigates how religions, religious identity, and religious phenomena are expressed in and through the comic book. Situated at the intersection of religious studies, critical theory, media studies, and literary analysis, the course asks students to consider a number of issues and concerns, including: the appropriateness of the medium to express religious ideas, practices, texts, and histories; the different ways in which narratives of salvation and spiritual transformation are visualized; the role of alternative comix in the critique of popular religion, the use of comics as a means to proselytize, confess, memorialize, and historicize; and the cultural status of comics as material objects of religious import.
Taught by: Arsenault
Course not offered every year
Activity: Seminar
1 Course Unit

RELS 208 Native American Religion and Literature
This course will examine films by and about Native Americans. From the very beginnings of film history, Native Americans have been a centrally important subject. While much of the writing about Native American films tends to focus on the perpetuation of stereotypes, this class will concentrate on four primary themes: 1) the role that film plays in helping the audience to understand the exceedingly complex place of indigenous people in "American" identity (with "American" signifying, in this instance, a hemispheric sense of identity); 2) the myriad of ways that indigenous people have been involved in the history of film as extras, actors, directors, producers; 3) how representations changed when Native Americans took control of production; 4) the ways in which films by and about Native Americans have helped to heal the historical trauma resulting from the "Indian Wars" that have gone on for 500+ years on the North American continent.
Taught by: Powell
Course not offered every year
Also Offered As: ANTH 282, CIMS 282, ENGL 282
Activity: Seminar
1 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
Activity: Lecture
1 Course Unit

RELS 200 Studies in the Hebrew Bible
This course introduces students to the methods and resources used in the modern study of the Bible. To the extent possible, these methods will be illustrated as they apply to a single book of the Hebrew Bible that will serve as the main focus for this course. The course is designed for undergraduates who have previously studied the Bible in Hebrew either in high school or college.
Course usually offered in spring term
Also Offered As: COML 228, HEBR 250, JWST 256
Prerequisites: Fluency in reading and translating Biblical Hebrew and a working knowledge of Biblical Hebrew grammar.
Activity: Lecture
1 Course Unit

RELS 222 Topics in Medieval Jewish Cultures
Topics vary
Course not offered every year
Also Offered As: JWST 222
Activity: Seminar
1 Course Unit

RELS 223 Jewish Literature in the Middle Ages in Translation
Course explores the cultural history of Jews in the lands of Islam from the time of Mohammed through the late 17th century (end of Ottoman expansion into Europe) -- in Iraq, the Middle East, al-Andalus and the Ottoman Empire. Primary source documents (in English translation) illuminate minority-majority relations, internal Jewish tensions (e.g., Qaraism), and developments in scriptural exegesis, rabbinic law, philosophy, poetry, polemics, mysticism and liturgy. Graduate students have additional reading and meetings. Spring 2015.
Taught by: Fishman/Stern
One-term course offered either term
Also Offered As: COML 257, JWST 153, NELC 158, NELC 458
Activity: Seminar
1 Course Unit

RELS 224 The Bible in Translation
This course introduces undergraduates and graduate 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, RELS 224 is a perfect follow-up course for RELS 125 "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 Course Unit
RELS 225 Introduction to the Dead Sea Scrolls
Exploration of the issues relating to the identification and history of the people who produced and used these materials as well as the claims made about the inhabitants of the Qumran site near the caves in which the scrolls were discovered, with a focus on what can be known about the community depicted by some of the scrolls, its institutions and religious life, in relation to the known Jewish groups at that time (the beginning of the Common Era). This will involve detailed description and analysis of the writings found in the caves -- sectarian writings, "apocrypha" and "pseudepigrapha," biblical texts and interpretations.
Taught by: Reed
Course not offered every year
Also Offered As: JWST 225, NELC 251, NELC 651
Activity: Seminar
1 Course Unit

RELS 227 Modern Jewish Thought
Through a reading of such thinkers as Martin Buber, Gershom Scholem and Franz Rosenzweig, the course will address some of the fundamental issues in modern Jewish thought and experience.
One-term course offered either term
Also Offered As: JWST 227
Activity: Seminar
1 Course Unit

RELS 230 Topics in European History
Topics vary.
One-term course offered either term
Also Offered As: JWST 230
Activity: Seminar
1 Course Unit

RELS 231 Jesus and Judaism
Course not offered every year
Also Offered As: JWST 233
Activity: Seminar
1 Course Unit

RELS 232 Reading the Apostle Paul
Course not offered every year
Activity: Seminar
1 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, Manichaeanism, and Islam. Readings will cover a broad range of sources, including selections from classical Syriac literature, Manichaean texts, Mesopotamian magic bowls, the so-called "Jesus Sutras," and the Quran. All readings will be provided in English, and no background is presumed.
Taught by: Han
Also Offered As: NELC 385, SAST 245
Activity: Lecture
1 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 time. 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 Course Unit

RELS 242 Muslim Sainthood Practices
This course aims at introducing various classical, popular and modern Muslim saints in South Asia. We will read the life stories of these saints and focus on their contribution to various religions in South Asia. We will learn about the major concepts initiated and circulated by these saints and their distinctive ways of dealing with spiritual aspects. While focusing on their sainthood practices, we also study the nature of the dialogue which addresses the questions such as pluralism, localism, and a new paradigm of spirituality that continually interacts with diverse modes of everyday life in South Asia. In order to understand their impact on visual and media cultures, we also watch two documentaries and compare these visual sources with sainthood literature and practices.
Taught by: Mohammad, M.A.
Also Offered As: SAST 251
Activity: Seminar
1 Course Unit

RELS 236 The Devil's Pact in Literature, Music and Film
For as long as we have been modern, the legend of the devil's pact has been the preferred metaphor for the desire to surpass the limits of human knowledge and power at any cost. Starting with the sixteenth-century Faust Book, which recounts the story of a scholar, alchemist and necromancer who sold his soul to the devil, and extending to the present, this course offers students a chance to explore our enduring fascination with the forbidden.
For BA Students: Arts and Letters Sector
Taught by: Richter
One-term course offered either term
Activity: Lecture
1 Course Unit
Notes: All readings and discussions in English.
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-edgethrough 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 and Phil Webster
Also Offered As: JWST 244
Activity: Lecture
1 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 Course Unit

RELS 246 Spirituality in the Age of Global Warming: How Can Science & the Humanities Work Together?
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. This part of the problem has been more powerfuly expressed in film, literature, and art. We will be looking at films like Spike Lee’s “When the Levees Broke,” about how the people of New Orleans turned to music and storytelling to rebuild their communities in the wake of Hurricane Katrina and Linda Hogan’s novel, “Solar Storm,” which explores how Native American women draw upon spirituality to heal their community after a dam flooded their ancestral homeland. The class will also work on an ongoing research project in partnership with the Canadian government and Ojibwe First Nations who submitted a successful UNESCO World Heritage Site application to preserve the boreal forest and the Native people’s traditional knowledge about their land. The class will be working on an interactive map to document how photographs, oral histories, and artwork helped convince UNESCO to preserve the land and the Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK) of the people who have lived on that land for thousands of years.
Taught by: Timothy Powell
Course not offered every year
Also Offered As: ENGL 282, ENVS 246
Activity: Seminar
1 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 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' of '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 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 a well as highlight a range of anthropological and historical works that are revelatory about the historical development of Sufi institutions and spaces in South Asia, and the state in East Asia. Focusing on China and Japan, we will learn 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 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 comprehendingmoments 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 class participation, 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.
Taught by: McDaniel
Prerequisite: Permission needed from instructor
Activity: Seminar
1 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 Course Unit

RELS 267 Food & Religion
Activity: Lecture
1 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: Seminar
1 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 Course Unit

RELS 276 Zen Buddhism
This course examines the history, doctrines, and practices of Zen Buddhism in China, Japan and the West. Topics include the monastic life, notable Zen masters, Zen’s cultural impact, and enlightenment.
One-term course offered either term
Activity: Lecture
1 Course Unit

RELS 303 Power and Peril
We imagine ancient Greece and Rome as the cradles of democracy and republicanism, the early Judea as pious theocracy, but the evidence tells us that monarchy was the most common and prevalent form of government in antiquity (and the premodern world in general). Despite their ubiquity, the King was a polarizing figure— in reality and in conception. On the one hand, some idealized the monarchy as the ideal leader, and monarchy provided the language with which to describe and even imagine the very gods— but on the other, monarchs were widely reviled in both theory and practice, from the Greek tyrant to the 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 for both the ideal ruler and the worst form of government. This class confronts the paradox of the King. This class will take a special look at the idea and institution of kingship in the Near East, among the Jews, Greeks, and Romans to assess and discuss similarities, differences, and mutual influences among these cultures. Through the lens of the “king” we will explore the idea of god, government, human frailty, and utopianism. Why did the rule of one prevail, why was it so attractive to so many? How was the royal rule legitimized? What role did religious beliefs play for keeping a monopolical system stable? What did people expect from their rulers and what happened if the ruler failed to fulfill these expectations? How was the concept of monarchical rule 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: JWST 335, NELC 335
Activity: Seminar
1 Course Unit

RELS 310 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: Anthea Butler
Course not offered every year
Also Offered As: AFRC 308
Activity: Seminar
1 Course Unit

RELS 311 Muslim, Christian, and Jewish Relations in the Middle East and North Africa: Historical Perspectives
This class is 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: JWST 335, NELC 335
Activity: Seminar
1 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
1 Course Unit

RELS 329 Honors Thesis Seminar
Required of honors majors who choose the research option.
Course usually offered in spring term
Activity: Independent Study
1 Course Unit
RELS 329 Wisdom in the Hebrew Bible
What does God want from us? Why are we here? How can we make the most of our existence? In this course we will explore how the Bible answers above questions and what this can tell us about the human condition during biblical times. Students will read select passages in the Book of Proverbs, Job and Qohelet (Ecclesiastes) in conjunction with Near Eastern texts. We will learn how ancient sages faced the uncertainties of life and the fleeting nature of human existence.
Taught by: Crantz
Course usually offered in fall term
Also Offered As: NELC 350, NELC 650, RELS 629
Activity: Seminar
1 Course Unit

RELS 332 Topics in Byzantine Art
Topic Varies. Fall 2017: This undergraduate seminar explores the Byzantine icon and its legacy. Spanning nearly two millennia, from the emergence of Christian sacred portrait to the reception of icon painting by the early twentieth-century avant-garde, the seminar will introduce you to the history, historiography, and theories of the icon. While our focus will be on Byzantium and the wider world of Orthodox Christianity, the seminar will also engage with fundamental questions concerning the nature, status, and agency of images across cultures. Topics to be addressed include iconoclasm and the problem of idolatry; the social and ritual lives of icons; authorship, originality, and replication; viewer response and the cultural construction of vision; the frontier between art and the sacred image; and the afterlife of the icon in modernity.
Taught by: Ousterhout
Course not offered every year
Also Offered As: ARTH 332
Activity: Seminar
1 Course Unit

RELS 335 St. Paul and his interpreters
Taught by: Webster
Activity: Seminar
1 Course Unit

RELS 352 Jewish Political Thought & Action
Weekly seminar explores expressions of Jewish political thought—and, where possible, political action—from biblical times to the present. Themes include the leadership of biblical priests, prophets and kings; covenant as the basis of the theocratic polity; the status of outsiders in biblical and rabbinic societies; constructions of political authority; changing understandings of Jewish "nationhood"; messianism; medieval Jewish ruminations on ideal government; the non-sovereign Jewish community's relationship to rulers; manifestations of Jewish communal autonomy; tensions between rabbinic and lay leadership; biblical Israel as a model for governance in early modern political thought; debates over Jewish Emancipation; expressions of Jewish socialism; varieties of pre-state Zionist thought; contemporary messianic Zionism; contemporary manifestations of Jewish political concerns. Primary sources (English translation) include readings from Hebrew Bible, ancient rabbinic texts, Jewish communal decrees, Moses Maimonides and other medieval Jewish thinkers; Baruch Spinoza, Moses Mendelssohn, Ber Barochov, Theodor Herzl, Martin Buber, Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook, Yeshayahu Leibovitz and contemporary writers. One session will take place in the Rare Book Room of Van Pelt Library. No prior knowledge is assumed.
Taught by: Fishman
Course not offered every year
Also Offered As: JWST 353
Activity: Seminar
1 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. 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
Prerequisites: Students must complete an interview with instructor before acquiring a permit.
Activity: Seminar
1 Course Unit

RELS 370 Corpse as Material Culture in the Study of Religion
Taught by: Toulson
Activity: Seminar
1 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 Course Unit

RELS 400 The Religious Right in America
From the Scopes Monkey Trial to Sarah Palin, conservative religion and groups have attempted to define and shape government and public policy in the United States. This course will look at the impact of conservative religion in American Politics and the ideas, personalities, and policy it has shaped. Special attention will focus on the 2008 and 2012 Election cycles, the use of media in the Religious Right, political personalities, and grassroots organizing integral to the Religious Right and its impact on American politics.
Taught by: Butler
Course usually offered in fall term
Activity: Seminar
1 Course Unit
RELS 409 Native American Spirituality, Health, and Contemporary Concerns
Spring 2014 Topic: "Native American Spirituality, Health, and Contemporary Concerns" will focus on traditional and contemporary conceptions of Health in four Native American communities—Lakota or Sioux, Navajo or Dine, Cherokee, and Ojibwe or Anishinaabe. The methodology will be interdisciplinary, drawing upon writings from the fields of health care, anthropology, literature, history, film studies, and religious studies. Students will learn about the complex interrelationships between traditional knowledge systems’ and modern, western conceptions of “medicine.” Some examples of this include the Lakota Ghost Dance, Navajo sand paintings, Cherokee protocols regarding sacred knowledge, and Anishinaabe herbal medicine. The readings will include anthropological studies of these forms of “medicine,” a history of Indian Health Services, first hand accounts of a female Navajo doctor trained in western medicine who then returned home to practice on the Navajo reservation, studies of historical trauma resulting from the massacre of Lakota at Wounded Knee, and contemporary studies of health care on Indian reservations. Students will be evaluated on the basis of in-class presentations and two research papers. The class will also participate in an ongoing project to develop a Cultural Sensitivities workshop that is being implemented at the Indian Health Care clinic at the Cass Lake Hospital on the Leech Lake Ojibwe reservation.
Taught by: Powell
One-term course offered either term
Also Offered As: AFRC 409, ANTH 409
Activity: Lecture
1 Course Unit

RELS 410 American Religion and the LGBTQ Experience
Taught by: Philip Francis
One-term course offered either term
Activity: Lecture
1 Course Unit

RELS 412 African American Spiritual Autobiography
This seminar will engage works of autobiography in the African American tradition with particular attention to the spiritual and religious contexts of the authors. We will discuss recurring themes, scriptural motifs, and religious and social tensions expressed in the works. Gender, political ideology, social activism, and religious identification will also be explored.
Course not offered every year
Also Offered As: AFRC 412
Activity: Seminar
1 Course Unit

RELS 418 Ancient Interpretation of the Bible
Christianity and Judaism are often called “Biblical religions” because they are believed to be founded upon the Bible. But the truth of the matter is that it was less the Bible itself than the particular ways in which the Bible was read and interpreted by Christians and Jews that shaped the development of these two religions and that also marked the difference between them. So, too, ancient Biblical interpretation—Jewish and Christian—laid the groundwork for, and developed virtually all the techniques and methods that have dominated literary criticism and hermeneutics (the science of interpretation) since then. The purpose of this course is to study some of the more important ways in which the Bible was read and interpreted by Jews and Christians before the modern period, and particularly in the first six centuries in the common era. We will make a concerted effort to view these interpretive approaches not only historically but also through the lens of contemporary critical and hermeneutical theory in order to examine their contemporary relevance to literary interpretation and the use that some modern literary theorists (e.g. Bloom, Kermode, Derrida, Todorov) have made of these ancient exegetes and their methods. All readings are in English translation, and will include selections from Philo of Alexandria, the Dead Sea Scrolls, Rabbinic midrash, the New Testament and early Church Fathers, Gnostic writings, Origen, and Augustine. No previous familiarity with Biblical scholarship is required although some familiarity with the Bible itself would be helpful.
Course not offered every year
Also Offered As: COML 556, JWST 356, JWST 555, NELC 356
Activity: Seminar
1 Course Unit

RELS 419 Jewish-Christian Relations Through the Ages
This is a Bi-directional course which explores attitudes toward, and perceptions of, the religious "Other", in different periods of history. Themes include legislation regulating interactions with the Other, polemics, popular beliefs about the Other, divergent approaches to scriptural interpretation, and cross-cultural influences, witting and unwitting. Different semesters may focus on Late Antiquity, the Middle Ages, Early Modern period, or contemporary times. May be repeated for credit.
Taught by: Fishman
Course not offered every year
Also Offered As: JWST 419
Activity: Seminar
1 Course Unit

RELS 422 Jewish Intellectual and Cultural History in the Early Modern Era: From the Spanish Expulsion to Spinoza
God and Nature examines the place of the natural world, medicine, and science in Jewish thought from antiquity to the modern era. It looks especially at a body of primary sources in Hebrew written during the age of the so-called “scientific revolution” and during its aftermath. The course is a seminar open to undergraduate and graduate students with a reading knowledge of classical Hebrew. Students without Hebrew with special interest in the subject might enroll with special permission from the instructor.
Taught by: Ruderman
One-term course offered either term
Also Offered As: HIST 449, JWST 449
Activity: Seminar
1 Course Unit
RELS 426 Rabbinic Writers on Rabbinic Culture
The course traces reflections on rabbinic culture produced within Jewish legal literature of the classic rabbinic period - Midrash, Mishna and Talmud - and in later juridical genres - talmudic commentary, codes and responsa. Attention will be paid to the mechanics of different genres, the role played by the underlying prooftext, the inclusion or exclusion of variant opinions, the presence of non-legal information, the balance between precedent and innovation. Reading knowledge of Hebrew is required.
Taught by: Fishman
Course not offered every year
Also Offered As: HEBR 486, JWST 426
Prerequisite: Reading knowledge of Hebrew
Activity: Seminar
1 Course Unit

RELS 429 Topics In Jewish History
Reading and discussion course on selected topics in Jewish history.
Course not offered every year
Also Offered As: GRMN 581, HIST 490, JWST 490
Activity: Seminar
1 Course Unit

RELS 433 Christian Thought From 200-1000
This course introduces students to the major intellectual issues of Christianity from the period of the formulation of orthodox theology (the third to the fifth centuries), through the early medieval era, to the dawn of scholastic theology around the year 1000. Although the emphasis is on the evolution of Christian thought, several aspects of social and political history will also be considered, for example, the growth of ascetic movements and the monastic ideal, relationship between Christianity and the Roman Empire, and the role of women in Christian history. Readings will be largely from primary sources, with several secondary authors (especially Peter Brown) serving as foils to interpretation. Students will be expected to do independent research in the library and on line, beyond the assigned readings of the course.
Taught by: Matter
Course not offered every year
Prerequisites: None--some background in European history helpful.
Activity: Seminar
1 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.
Taught by: Matter
Course not offered every year
Prerequisites: None-some background in European history helpful.
Activity: Seminar
1 Course Unit

RELS 438 Topics in Medieval History
This seminar introduces students to the development of Jewish and Christian biblical interpretation by focusing on ancient, medieval, and modern interpretations of the Sermon on the Mount. 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. Students will encounter a variety of important interpreters (including Origen, John Chrysostom, Augustine of Hippo, Thomas Aquinas, Martin Luther, Leo Tolstoy, Albert Schweitzer, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Clarence Jordan, and Hans Dieter Betz), guided by appropriate secondary materials. The seminar will utilize a combination of lecture, discussion, student presentations, reports, close reading, and a research paper. Students will be encouraged to do original research in the primary sources. This course has no prerequisites. The readings will be made available in English. The class will utilize a combination of lecture, discussion, student presentations, reports, close reading, and a research paper.
Taught by: Treat
One-term course offered either term
Also Offered As: JWST 410
Activity: Seminar
1 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, Bahá’í, 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 Course Unit

RELS 440 Later Islamic Art & Architecture
Istanbul, Samarkand, Isfahan, Cairo and Delhi as major centers of art production in the fourteenth to seventeenth centuries. Attention is given to urban and architectural achievement as well as to the key monuments of painting and metalwork. The visual environment of the “gunpowder empires” is discussed. Taught by: Holod
Also Offered As: AAMW 531, ARTH 436, COML 417, NELC 436
Activity: Lecture
1 Course Unit

RELS 446 Digital Humanities
Penn recently opened the Price Lab for Digital Humanities as part of the university's new strategic plan, so it is a very exciting moment for DH at Penn. This class might be considered an advanced introduction to the relatively short history of DH. It will focus on one of the questions that has vexed the field from the beginning: Why are the Digital Humanities So White? as Tara McPherson put it rather bluntly in a chapter of Debates in the Digital Humanities. The class will provide an overview of some of the foundational texts of DH, but the primary focus of the class will be involving students in a new DH project to construct an interactive timeline, built in Omeka. The spatio-temporal timeline seeks to represent Iroquois history as seen from the perspective of Iroquois scholar and Faithkeeper, Richard Hill. Hill is the director of the Devoahajah: Indigenous Knowledge Centre on the Six Nations reserve in the Grand River region of Ontario and one of the most highly regarded traditional knowledge keepers of his generation, so it is a great honor to be able to work with him. On a more theoretical level, the class will be addressing the relationship between cultural codes and digital codes. In other words, how to represent Iroquois spiritual history (i.e., mythical events) on a chronological timeline? How to represent indigenous space on maps created by the people who colonized the Iroquois (e.g., the boarder between Canada and the US cuts the Iroquois traditional homeland in half?) Students will learn how to evaluate a complex and challenging project like this, which is still in its earliest stages. On a more practical level, students will learn skills in the exhibit building software Omeka. The class will engage many different forms of history from archival documents to YouTube videos, in its study of how digital technology makes it possible to represent the indigenous oral tradition much more accurately than is possible on the printed page. Taught by: Tim Powell
Also Offered As: HIST 446
Activity: Seminar
1 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 Course Unit

RELS 473 Southeast Asian Buddhism
This course traces the history and development of Buddhist culture and religion in Southeast Asia. It is a discussion seminar course that examines the role of foundational texts like the Taishō-Humikatha and Mulasasana, as well as debating the role of kingship, magic, politics, economics, and art in the growth of Buddhism and Buddhist teachings in the region. It is open to undergraduates and graduates. Course not offered every year
Also Offered As: SAST 373
Activity: Seminar
1 Course Unit

RELS 498 Advanced Research Project
One-term course offered either term
Activity: Independent Study
1 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 Course Unit

RELS 509 Teaching Religious Studies
Many faculty in academia, especially at a research university, think of themselves as scholars first and teachers second. The emphasis on scholarship is essential for a position at a research university, but what the culture of such institutions can obscure is the importance of teaching as part of the academic vocation. The purpose of this course is to help prepare graduate students to teach academic religious studies, not to teach them how to teach, a skill developed through experience and feedback, but to encourage students to plan in advance for their work as educators and to develop their teaching aspirations and approach in dialogue with issues and debates in Religious Studies, the Humanities and the field of Education. Taught by: Weitzman
Course usually offered in fall term
Activity: Seminar
1 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 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 religious movements in the world, Pentecostalism continues to have a profound effect on the religious landscape. Pentecostalism's unique blend of charismatic worship, religious practices, and flamboyant, media-savvy leadership, has drawn millions into this understudied 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, FOLK 517
Activity: Seminar
1 Course Unit

RELS 519 An Introduction to Religion in South Asia
This undergraduate-level course introduces students to the multi-religious complexion of South Asia as a region, with a particular focus upon key religious traditions and the resemblances and interactions between them. This course is divided into two parts. In the first part of this course, students are introduced to key religious traditions of South Asia, Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, Islam and Sikhism. Students will be encouraged to survey academic works pertaining to, on the one hand, the literature, doctrines, cosmologies, rituals and histories of, and prominent places of worship in, the Hindu, Buddhist, Jain, Muslim and Sikh religious traditions. On the other hand, the development of South Asia into a distinctive space and spiritual 'homeland' for multi-religious communities. Whilst the first part of the course focuses upon religious traditions autonomously, the subsequent section of the course is thematic and encourages students to make comparisons, and discover sophisticated relationships and dynamic interactions between religious traditions in South Asia. Students are introduced to scholarly writings that are revelatory of the materiality of religious traditions in pre-modern and modern South Asia; everyday forms of piety in South Asia; gender positions in religious traditions; encounters of religious traditions with European colonialism; and, perceptions of the 'other' in pre-modern religious traditions. Herein, students will find multiple sites of resemblances or differences, and cultural negotiations, engagements and contests, within religious traditions in South Asia.
Taught by: Sevea
One-term course offered either term
Also Offered As: RELS 119, SAST 529
Activity: Lecture
1 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, RELS 321
Activity: Seminar
1 Course Unit

RELS 523 Studies in Medieval Jewish Culture
Primary sources include readings from ancient, medieval and early modern Jewish texts. Students must be able to read unvocalized Hebrew. Open to undergraduates only with the instructor's permission.
Taught by: Fishman
One-term course offered either term
Also Offered As: HEBR 583, HIST 523, JWST 523
Prerequisites: Reading knowledge of Hebrew.
Activity: Seminar
1 Course Unit
REL 533 Ancient and Medieval Church History
Many historians have argued that the most successful type of religious life in the Christian tradition is that founded by Saint Benedict of Nursia in early medieval Italy. The vision of a devout life in community dominated the medieval Christian landscape, and inspired some of the greatest classics of western Christian spirituality. This course will trace the Benedictine ideal from its roots in the Desert Fathers of the early Church, through Benedict’s life and the formation of his Rule, to his role played by Benedictines in the development of medieval secular learning, theology, music, and spirituality. We will end by reading some contemporary works on the Benedictine ideal in the modern world.
Taught by: Matter
One-term course offered either term
Also Offered As: HIST 533
Activity: Seminar
1 Course Unit

REL 535 Varieties of Christian Thought before Irenaeus
A survey of the known groups and perspectives that emerged in the first 150 years or so of the development of "Christianity" from its roots in Judaism and the hellenistic world(s), with special attention to the primary sources (especially literary) and to modern attempts at historical synthesis.
Taught by: Reed
Course offered spring; odd-numbered years
Activity: Seminar
1 Course Unit

REL 537 Medieval Christian Mysticism
Selected topics in Christian mystical writings. Authors will be read in English translation. Knowledge of medieval languages is helpful, but not required.
Taught by: Matter
One-term course offered either term
Also Offered As: ITAL 530
Activity: Seminar
1 Course Unit

REL 538 Modern Christian Thinkers
Close study of selected texts dealing with the relation between Christian ideas and modern thought.
Taught by: Matter
One-term course offered either term
Activity: Seminar
1 Course Unit

REL 540 David and Solomon
Also Offered As: JWST 541
Activity: Lecture
1 Course Unit

REL 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; authenticics, 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 Course Unit

REL 543 RELS Graduate Methodology Course
This course is an introduction to a variety of critical approaches to religion. The first part of the course will take an historical approach to the development of Religious Studies through the lens of seven foundational theorists: Muller, Marx, Weber, Durkheim, Eliade, Geertz, and Said. The second part of the course will explore contemporary approaches to these theorists, in the process discussing anthropological, sociological, and phenomenological approaches to topics of concern currently to Religious Studies. Throughout the semester, we will trace different approaches to these themes across multiple theorists. In this course, we will consider the category of 'religion' as constructed. We will cultivate a critical approach that orients itself toward the disciplinary object (and the conditions for its emergence), the disciplinary subject (and the conditions for its emergence), and their dialectical interaction. Objects and ideas will not be approached as intrinsically or exclusively religious. Rather, we will explore historical, ideological, political, and cultural dynamics.
Taught by: Robb
Also Offered As: SAST 543
Prerequisite: Reading knowledge of Arabic
Activity: Seminar
1 Course Unit

REL 545 Sufism
Selected topics, such as Sufi Texts or The Qur’an, in the study of Islamic religion.
Taught by: Elias
One-term course offered either term
Also Offered As: NELC 534
Prerequisite: Reading knowledge of Arabic
Activity: Seminar
1 Course Unit
RELS 549 The Mullah & The Englishman - Islam in Modern South Asia
This course introduces students to Islam in modern South Asia, with a particular focus on the development of 'new' Muslim religious idioms, orientations, pedagogies and movements in 19th and 20th century South Asia. This course is divided into three parts. In the first part of this course, students are provided with an overview of: Muslim institutions and spaces in pre-colonial South Asia, the historical emergence of South Asia as a prominent global center of Islam, and the development of Urdu as an Islamic idiom. The second and main part of this course introduces students to academic literature concerning sophisticated encounters between the Muslim elite in north India and modern political and technological developments. The intimate interactions of the 'Mullah' and the 'Englishman' from the 19th to 20th century will thus be revealed to students. This part focuses upon, on the one hand, the role of Islam and pious Muslims in the colonial army, and on the other hand, Muslim initiatives to educate an Islamic 'modernism', 'traditionalism', 'fundamentalism' and 'Sufism', and appropriate print technologies for the creation of public spheres. Students will be introduced to historical scholarship revelatory of how these Muslim pedagogies and print initiatives were based upon sophisticated transcultural networks and exchange. In the third part of this course, students will be encouraged to engage with contemporary literature on South Asian Muslim political philosophy and nationalism, and the transcultural intellectual exchanges that produced key Muslim political ideologies.
Taught by: Sevea
One-term course offered either term
Also Offered As: RELS 149, SAST 502
Activity: Seminar
1 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 Course Unit

RELS 555 History of Print Culture in South Asia, 1600 to the present
This course asks the question: what changes with the arrival of print in South Asia? The printing press arrived in India in force in 1800, within 25 years, hundreds of publications proliferated in several South Asian languages. The adoption and response to print in South Asia offers understanding not only regarding information dissemination but also authority production among a wide range of religious and cultural groups in South Asia. We will consider critically the relationship between material culture, networks of political power, modes of authority transmission and religious meaning in South Asia from 1600 to the present. This course will start with a unit considering the techniques of manuscript knowledge reproduction and transmission across South Asia from 1600 to 1800. We will then consider the rise of the East India Company's Press in the late 18th century, the development of print techniques, and the appearance of the private publishing company. We will then consider the rise of Lahore as a printing hub and center of print culture in the 19th century, alongside the wider entrenchment of a newspaper print network, railway and postal networks. The early 20th century sees the rise of both large urban and qasbah-based newspaper networks, alongside a thriving print culture in the context of nationalist movements and communal conversations. A final unit on the post-Partition milieu looks at the rise of digital and new media. Crucial to our conversation will be the symbiotic role of print and formation of new boundaries around the category of religion.
Taught by: Robb
Course usually offered in fall term
Prerequisite: Graduate Course
Activity: Seminar
1 Course Unit

RELS 557 Seminar in Rabbinic Judaism
Most of the foundational writings of rabbinic Judaism corpora of Midrash, Mishna, and the two Talmuds were in existence by the end of the sixth century CE. Yet, for several centuries thereafter, there is little evidence attesting to the lived nature of rabbinic culture and society. Course will focus on writings by Jews and about Jews, produced between the 7th and 10th centuries, complemented by secondary sources. Texts will include selections from archaeological inscriptions; Midrash; liturgical poetry; Targum; Masora; geonic responsa, writings by Muslims and by Church Fathers. While students must be able to read Hebrew, much class time will be devoted to the improvement of reading and comprehension skills. Undergraduates should seek permission of the instructor.
Taught by: Stern, Reed
Course not offered every year
Also Offered As: JWST 553, NELC 557
Prerequisites: Proficiency in Hebrew and/or Greek recommended.
Undergraduates need permission to enroll.
Activity: Seminar
1 Course Unit
Notes: May be repeated for credit.

RELS 562 Religions of Southern India
Critical examination of selected problem areas in the interpretation of religious texts, traditions, institutions, and practices in South and Southeast Asia.
Course not offered every year
Activity: Seminar
1 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.

Taught by: McDaniel
Course not offered every year
Also Offered As: ARTH 510, EALC 718
Activity: Seminar
1 Course Unit

RELS 581 How Digital Humanities Can Help Save the Planet
Students will be taught each phase of designing a sophisticated digital exhibit of museum quality. This includes choosing a platform, designing a compelling exhibit, writing metadata, learning about grant writing to support and sustain digital exhibits, and theorizing how digital technology can be used to educate the general public about the importance of preserving forests in the Anthropocene (Age of Climate Change). A significant part of the course will be dedicated to learning about Environmental Humanities including: 1) Scientific studies of climate change in the Arctic, the Amazon, the forests of North America; 2) Contemporary politics effecting the Environmental Protection Agency; 3) Why Native Americans were successful at the first standoff at Standing Rock; and 4) the Data Rescue project that Penn is participating in to save Environmental data being removed from the web by the present administration. We will also study state-of-the-art digital exhibits like the WWhat is Missing?: Creating a Global Memorial to the Planet site by Maya Lin, who designed the Vietnam Memorial in Washington D.C.

Taught by: Powell
Also Offered As: ANTH 581
Activity: Seminar
1 Course Unit

RELS 586 History of Islam in Asia
This class looks at the history of Islam across South Asia, East Asia, and Southeast Asia with a focus on the last three centuries. Contrary to the popular perception that the Middle East defines Islam, Asia has been the source of some of Islam’s most important social and reform movements. Students will contrast different Muslim societies over the last three centuries, examine points of confluence for geographically- or culturally-distinct Muslim peoples, and in their writing assignments focus on the history of one society in a wider Islamic context.

Taught by: Robb
Activity: Seminar
1 Course Unit

RELS 605 Theories of Myth
Theories of myth are the center of modern and post-modern, structural and post-structural thought. Myth has served as a vehicle and a metaphor for the formulation of a broad range of modern theories. In this course we will examine the theoretical foundations of these approaches to myth focusing on early thinkers such as Vico, and concluding with modern twentieth century scholars in several disciplines that make myth the central idea of their studies.

Taught by: Ben-Amos
Course usually offered in spring term
Also Offered As: COML 662, FOLK 629, NELC 683
Activity: Seminar
1 Course Unit

RELS 609 Divination and Semiotics
This seminar will explore ancient Greek (and some Roman) approaches to the arts. Greek audiences and critics alike were deeply interested in both theoretical and practical questions about the arts, especially literature. We will consider not only the philosophical tradition, but also popular notions of aesthetic value, including the varieties of audience responses and fandom. Among the authors we will study are various early Greek philosophical and sophistic thinkers, Plato, Aristotel, Hellenistic literary theorists, including Philodemus, Horace, Longinus, and selected theorists of late antiquity.

Taught by: Struck
Course not offered every year
Also Offered As: GREK 609
Activity: Seminar
1 Course Unit

RELS 610 Religion in Public Life
This seminar is an introduction to six of the most debated areas involving religion in public life: diversity in American religions; church-state relations and the Constitution; issues in specific eastern and western religions; religious dimensions of contemporary ethical and social debates (abortion, euthanasia, minority and gender roles); religious symbolism in the public sphere; and the prevailing understandings of religion in the media and modern society. Teachers, school administrators, journalists, public policy specialists, social workers, lawyers, and health care professionals all encounter situations in which the religious sensitivities of “clients” (students, parents, readers, etc.) affect the ways in which they discharge their duties. This seminar serves as an introduction to the Religion in Public Life concentration within the Master of Liberal Arts Program, which is designed to provide professionals with an understanding of the many historical, social and legal issues that complicate discussions of religion in public situations.

Course not offered every year
Activity: Seminar
1 Course Unit

RELS 617 Proseminar in Africana Studies
This course focuses on the historical and cultural relationship between Africans and their descendants abroad.

Taught by: Beavers, Butler, Charles, Jackson, Savage, Thomas, Zuberi
Two terms. student must enter first term.
Also Offered As: AFRC 640, COMM 740
Activity: Seminar
1 Course Unit
RELS 620 Godliness, Miracles, Madness
This graduate-level course introduces students to religious worlds within port cities of the modern Indian Ocean that were centered upon peripatetic Muslim, Savia, Christian and Sikh miracle-workers, missionaries and 'gods.' This course will particularly consider how extant, published sources reveal how religion in the 19th and 20th century cosmopolitan port cities and islands: was centered upon holy men and women or spiritual beings, and intricately connected to modern economic, political and technological developments in the Indian Ocean. On the other hand, to anthropological, historical and literary works on Muslim saints, Christian missionaries and Saiva gods in the Indian Ocean. s or islands of, and religions or religious networks in, the modern Indian Ocean. In the second and main section of this course, students will be introduced to contemporary academic literature pertaining to the inter-linkages between itinerant miracle-workers, missionaries, 'gods' and devotional cults, and economic, political and technological developments in the Indian Ocean. As well as works that explore European institutions, barracks, plantations, cells, and asylums, and steam travel being steeped in customary religion, carnivals, ecstasy, madness and miracle stories. Here, students will be encouraged to consider ways in which a study of religion and religious economies of modern Indian Ocean port cities can be recovered through extracts from a range of anthropological, literary and historical sources. In the third part of this course, students will be encouraged to engage with the question of whether the religion of devotional cults preoccupied with the powers of Muslim, Savia, Christian, and Sikh miracle-workers, missionaries and 'gods' in cosmopolitan port cities, was a distinct product of circulations within the Indian Ocean.

Taught by: Sevea
Course usually offered in fall term
Also Offered As: SAST 632
Activity: Seminar
1 Course Unit

RELS 629 Wisdom in the Hebrew Bible
Taught by: Crantz
Course not offered every year
Activity: Seminar
1 Course Unit

RELS 632 Hinduism & Colonial Mdrnty
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 640
Activity: Seminar
1 Course Unit

RELS 670 Religious Bodies and Sex in South Asia
This graduate-level course introduces students to the writings of key religious scholars in modern South Asia who associated the regeneration of Hinduism, Islam, and Sikhism with the cultivation of bodies and sexual practices. Particular attention will be paid towards religious texts produced in modern India, Pakistan and Bangladesh pertaining to sexual bodies, exercises and health; celibacy; body-building; the transmission of sexual knowledge; and the political roles of the 'Hindu', 'Muslim' and 'Sikh' body. In this course, students will be encouraged to engage a range of sources including religio-sexual manuals, autobiographies, novels, speeches, pamphlets, official records, recipes and films. Moreover, students will be introduced to the academic literature on South Asian religious scholars and 'sex gurus' in South and Southeast Asia; religious sexuality in South Asia, Southeast Asia, the Middle East and Europe; and, the transcultural literary networks that led to the production of religio-sexual texts in modern South Asia.

Taught by: Elias
Course not offered every year
Also Offered As: RELS 743, SAST 633
Activity: Seminar
1 Course Unit

RELS 643 The Persian Intellectual Tradition
What makes Persian culture distinctive within broader Islamic intellectual history, and what constitutes the historical and geographical boundary of the Persianate intellectual and cultural zone? These questions lie at the center of inquiry in this seminar in which participants will read and discuss a broad range of works from the 11th to the 20th centuries. Readings will include works on philosophy and language, Sufi epic poems, religious and cultural geographies, accounts of natural and manufactured wonders, urban and political histories, as well as other kinds of texts. All readings will be in English for the regular meeting of the seminar; students with a reading knowledge of Persian and an interest in participating in an additional meeting to read the assignments in their original language should register for the higher of the two numbers listed for this course.

Taught by: Elias
Course not offered every year
Also Offered As: RELS 743, SAST 633
Activity: Seminar
1 Course Unit

RELS 701 Readings in African American Religion History
Traditional narratives of African American Religion go from slavery 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 Course Unit
RELS 702 Topics in Medieval Art
Spring 2017: For the Christians of Medieval Europe, pilgrimages were one of the key embodied experiences of faith. Reliquaries, churches with their welcoming portals, manuscripts and music: all were crafted to augment the corporeal experience of the divine. This seminar will take the material culture surrounding the relic and its veneration as a lens for exploring the Middle Ages, from the Early Christian to the High Gothic. Cross-disciplinary methodologies and cross-cultural examples will be considered to advance our understanding of these phenomena. While proceeding chronologically, each week will focus on a distinct strategy for shaping the interaction between faith and matter.
Taught by: Guerin
Course not offered every year
Also Offered As: ARTH 740, SPAN 630
Activity: Seminar
1 Course Unit

RELS 735 Seminar in Judaism and/or Christianity in the Hellenistic Era
Selected topics from current research interests relating to early Judaism and early Christianity.
Taught by: Reed
Two terms. student may enter either term.
Also Offered As: CLST 735, JWST 735
Prerequisites: Qualified undergraduates may enroll with permission from the instructor.
Activity: Seminar
1 Course Unit
Notes: Knowledge of Greek Presupposed. Student may enter either term

RELS 736 Seminar in Medieval Religious Studies
Selected topics in medieval religious studies, especially biblical exegesis. Reading knowledge of medieval Latin required.
Taught by: Matter
One-term course offered either term
Activity: Seminar
1 Course Unit

RELS 742 Topics in Islam
Fall 2012 Topic: TBD
Taught by: Elias
Course not offered every year
Also Offered As: NELC 782, SAST 763
Prerequisites: A reading knowledge of modern Persian (Farsi/Dari/Tajik) is required.
Activity: Seminar
1 Course Unit

RELS 743 The Persian Intellectual Tradition
What makes Persian culture distinctive within broader Islamic intellectual history, and what constitutes the historical and geographical boundary of the Persianate intellectual and cultural zone? These questions lie at the center of inquiry in this seminar in which participants will read and discuss a broad range of works from the 11th to the 20th centuries. Readings will include works on philosophy and language, Sufi epic poems, religious and cultural geographies, accounts of natural and manufactured wonders, urban and political histories, as well as other kinds of texts. All readings will be in English for the regular meeting of the seminar; students with a reading knowledge of Persian and an interest in participating in an additional meeting to read the assignments in their original language should register for the higher of the two numbers listed for this course.
Taught by: Elias
Also Offered As: NELC 713, RELS 643, SAST 633
Prerequisites: To take course as RELS743 prior knowledge of Persian is required.
Activity: Seminar
1 Course Unit

RELS 745 Visual Cultures in Islam
Activity: Lecture
1 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 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 Course Unit

RELS 999 Independent Study
One-term course offered either term
Activity: Independent Study
1 Course Unit
Notes: See department for section numbers.