"In fact, if I went back to college today, I think I would probably major in comparative religion because that’s how integrated [religion] is in everything that we are working on and deciding and thinking about in life today."

-- John Kerry
REL 101: Introduction to Religious Studies, GPR, GL - Online
This course is an introduction to the academic study of religion. Entailed in this study will be an attempt to arrive at a better understanding of the meaning attributed to the concept of religion and to assess the ways in which religious traditions, communities, and individuals function within and consequently influence human culture. Furthermore, the course will consist of an examination of the ways in which cultures influence various conceptions of religious faith and practice. During the semester, we will explore a diversity of religious traditions and expressions and a variety of beliefs, rituals, and concepts associated with them in order to evaluate the significance of religion and religious thought, both historically and in a contemporary context.

REL 109: Religion and Contemporary Culture GPR - Online
This course is an introductory level course in which we will investigate the major global religious traditions and their influence on national, international, and global politics.

REL 212: Christianity from the Reformation to the Present, GHP, GL, GMO - T/R, 2 PM -3:15 PM
This course will consist of a survey of Christian history and thought from the Protestant Reformation to our contemporary context.

REL 231: Religion in America, GHP GMO - Online
This course involves an exploration of the dynamic nature of religion in the United States. This will involve a historical examination of the diversity of religious expressions present in an American context as well as an explication of the significance of the plurality of religious traditions present in contemporary America. Particular attention will be devoted to understanding major currents in American religious history and how various religious traditions have affected the religious topography in the United States. The following case studies will be emphasized: Religion and the American Revolution and Religion and Science.

REL 250: Religious Traditions and Care of the Earth, GN, WI - T/R, 3:30 PM - 4:45 PM
This course is a study of the relationship between religion and the natural environment. Major topics to be covered will include the relationship between religion and ecology, the potential problems that certain religious worldviews pose for valuing non-human nature, and the emerging role of religious perspectives in addressing issues of ecological concern. We will also assess various definitions of the terms religion, spirituality, and nature including ways in which these terms have been employed in both a historical and contemporary context as well as the ways in which interpretations of these terms lead to understandings of the human-nature relationship. The question that will serve as our orientation throughout the semester is the following: In a time of widespread ecological degradation, what is the potential for religion or the religious to offer a significant contribution toward the attainment of sustainable human cultures? This question will be explored with reference to conceptions of the natural environment from existing religious traditions as well as through an examination of whether concern and care for natural environments can be understood as a form of religious expression.
REL 201: Bible, Africans and African Americans, GPR, GL - Online

This course will examine the impact of the Bible’s encounter with Africans and African-Americans going back to periods of slavery in the Americas and European Colonialism of Africa. We will also look at recent attempts to develop African and African-American hermeneutics and read works by African and African-American biblical scholars and theologians towards this end. Issues of race, slavery, colonialism, exploitation, suppression, and “white supremacy” will be focused on. Comparison will be made to Eurocentric approaches to Biblical interpretation juxtaposing the Postcolonial perspective that emerges from the African and African American perspectives.

REL 311: Topics in Biblical Studies, WI - T/R, 11 AM - 12:15 PM

An introductory course in religion offering the student opportunity to understand and reflect upon the place of select Biblical Themes such as Creation, Sin, Redemption, Justice, etc., in the Christian tradition. The course will focus on select topics and delve deep into each one to analyze the origins, historical backgrounds and theological developments. An understanding of how the various themes function throughout the Bible, and to also see how they have been interpreted within Judeo-Christian settings, from ancient times to the present.
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FALL 2019 COURSES

REL 201: The Bible in Western Culture, GPR, GL - M/W/F, 2 PM - 2:50 PM

What happened to the books of the Bible in the centuries after they were written, as they were read out, heard, interpreted, and pondered? This course traces the afterlives of key texts from the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament in Jewish, Christian, and Islamic cultures in antiquity, the middle ages, and in the modern United States. This year we will focus on the story of Adam and Eve; and the biblical wisdom literature of Lamentations, Job, and Ecclesiastes. We examine how religious thinkers and communities have used these texts to grapple with “Big Religious Questions” about life, diversity, gender, sexuality, suffering, misfortune, ethical demands, human responsibility, forgiveness, and the place of humans in the universe.

It counts as an elective for the Religious Studies major and minor. It carries a Women's and Gender Studies marker and counts as an elective for the WGS major or minor.

REL 301: Early Christianity, WI - M/W, 3:30 PM - 4:45 PM

This seminar examines a wide variety of Christian beliefs, practices, and experiences in the period from the second to the fifth centuries, with a focus on the history of Christian ideas. It is conceived as a survey of patristic literature, the writings of the early church fathers. We will read and discuss primary sources including theological and apologetic writings, sermons, and letters. Topics of investigation will include the development of Christian institutions, structures and rituals, relations between Christians and the Roman state, the emergence of a Christian intellectual culture, the formation of orthodox doctrines concerning the incarnation and the Trinity, and the role of contemplation in Christian life. This course will also address larger questions about what a religion is, how religions can be studied—especially historical religions—from a variety of sources, and how scholars might come to understand what a religion was like for the people who practiced it.

Class will be run as a seminar discussion with everyone expected to contribute to our common task of interpreting the primary texts and evaluating the secondary literature. This course is writing intensive and receives WI credit.
REL 202: Hebrew Bible GHP, GPM - M/W/F, 1 PM - 1:50 PM

This course offers an introduction to the Hebrew Bible and the religion of ancient Israel. Through lecture, critical reading of primary and secondary sources, and discussion, we will come to understand this complex text not only as a work of literature, but also as the product of distinct cultural and historical environments. We will not read the entire Bible! Rather, we will explore a selection of readings that represent the Bible’s main literary genres and themes. Central concerns of the course will be the relationship between history, theology, and ideology in this diverse text, as well as topics in biblical spirituality such as covenant, prayer, prophecy, doubt, and love.

REL 312/WGS 312: Judaism and the Construction of Gender, WI - W, 5:30 PM - 8:30 PM

This course examines how Judaism constructs gender through social ideology, literature, religious practice, and law. Topics include Jewish legal discussions regarding women's bodies and reproductive rights, Jewish masculinity in the context of Western culture, Jewish marriage traditions, Jewish sexuality, Jewish ideas about gendering God, Judaism and LGBTQIA+ identities, and changing Jewish gender norms through time.
REL 231: Religion in America, GHP, GMO - Online

How many religions are practiced in this country? Is the US becoming a more secular nation? Why do some people say that the United States is fundamentally Christian, and why do some argue against that idea? What does it mean to be “spiritual but not religious”? This course introduces you to the tools and concepts central to the study of religion in America. We will survey historical events, from the early Native American encounter with colonial settlers to the present day, while asking what makes American religion American: how it is present in public and private life, and how people from different religious traditions have played their part in the multiplicity of histories and cultures that comprise this country. Specific attention is devoted to pluralism, inclusivism, hybridity, and diversity, to the cross-pollination that occurs in religious and spiritual communities, and also to how religious identity groupings carve out social spaces that create boundaries--sometimes violent ones--between people and communities. One case we will consider is the influence of Asian religious traditions and ideas on the rise of secular spiritualities starting in the late 19th century and continuing today.
REL 221: Buddhism, GPR, GN - T/R, 9:30 AM - 10:45 AM

This course is an introduction to the history, institutions, doctrines, and ritual practices of Buddhism. The course will progress along two parallel tracks, one chronological and the other thematic, providing on the one hand a sense of the historical development of Buddhism, and on the other a general overview of some central themes. Along the historical track, the course proceeds from Buddhism’s inception in India through to the present day, with each class addressing different aspects of the history of this tradition. At the same time, each week will focus on a given theme that relates to the historical development of Buddhism. Themes include mythical and historical narrative, the spread of Buddhism, Buddhism and modernity, Buddhism and feminism, Buddhism and race, Buddhism and science, and more. This semester we will be accomplishing these goals by studying the biographical and autobiographical writings of Buddhists through the ages.

REL 111: Introduction to Asian Religion, GPR - Online

This course is an introductory survey of major religious and philosophical traditions of Asia. We will explore together the practices and beliefs of Hinduism, Jainism, Buddhism, Confucianism and Daoism through these traditions’ history, mythology, literature, aesthetic expressions and life stories of their followers. Despite their origins in Asia, these traditions are today part of a global context, so the course has as one of its main goals to inspire students to appreciate the diverse religious universe that surrounds us, instilling in them at the same time a critical perspective in relation to their own particular cultural backgrounds. Religious traditions shape our perceptions of the Universe, linking the present to the past and the future, and our local contexts to global contexts and beyond. To investigate them is then to expand our own view of Universe and our place in it.
REL 225: Introduction to Islam,  GPR, GN - M/W/F, 11 AM - 11:50 AM

The importance of Islam in the politico-religious life of the 21st century can scarcely be overestimated. Yet for many, the roots, practices and tenets of this nearly 1,400-year-old religion are shrouded in mystery. This course provides an introduction to the origins and history of Islam, including the genesis and development of its sacred scripture and monumental institutions of law, theology, and Sufism. It covers challenges posed by sectarianism, modernity and encounters with the West, as well as contemporary Muslim practice and the status of women in Islamic societies. Students will gain an appreciation for the rich diversity of thought and practice characterizing Islam as well as the shared rituals and history uniting its more than one billion adherents.

REL 420: Internship in Religious Studies

Practical experience in a variety of professional settings. Includes 10 hours per week at internship site, plus regular meetings with a faculty advisor.
REL 111: Introduction to the Asian Religions, GPR - T/R, 9:30 AM - 10:45 AM ~ T/R, 2 PM - 3:15 PM

This introductory course will grant you an opportunity to begin exploring a collection of religious traditions that originated in or are practiced in great number in South and East Asia. You will gain an acquaintance with Hindu, Buddhist, Jain, Sikh, Confucian, Daoist and Muslim philosophies, texts, and religious cultures, and discover these traditions’ influences upon contemporary society and self-understanding in South and East Asia. This course is designed to wet your appetite for further study and exploration of both the traditions we explore together, and ‘religion’ more broadly. Thus, you will also begin to articulate what constitutes responsible religious scholarship and reflect upon how your definition of ‘religion’ might be shaped or transformed by the religious phenomena we study together.

FMS 141: Freshman Seminar in Philosophical, Religious and Ethical Principles—Global Perspectives:
Course Title: Food, Feasting and Fasting in Religion

In this course we will explore the role that food and rituals of eating and fasting play in a variety of religious traditions, particularly as a means of forming community, performing religious ethics and achieving ultimate religious goals. To do this, we will comparatively examine a variety of Hindu, Buddhist, Jain, Christian, Jewish and Muslim religious foodways. In the process of this comparative study, we will uncover both shared and particular approaches to and understandings of food, eating and fasting. Additionally, through experiential classroom activities and reflective writing, we will also consider the significance and meaning of food, eating, and fasting in our individual lives and broader cultural context.
REL 209: Introduction to Christian Thought, GPR, GL - M/W/F, 10 AM - 10:50 AM

Hybrid course: Friday lectures replaced with weekly online writing assignment. Heavy reading. Two tests.

Why you should take this course:
1. You want to know why Christians think God is three, how they think Jesus saves, why they think God permits evil, what they think God does about it, what they think God does about death, what they think God wants with sex, or what they mean by salvation, anyway.
2. It's a good first course in Christianity, designed to inform those who know little.
3. It's a good advanced course in Christianity, designed to interest, even surprise those who know a lot.
4. The readings are some of the greatest hits in Christian thought.
5. You want to read classic old stuff, like Augustine and Calvin.
6. You want to read the latest new stuff, published in July.
7. Frosh couldn't take courses like this in high school.
8. Seniors need training for jobs that involve thinking, writing, or cooking up reasons. Theologians think about theology much as lawyers think about law or doctors go about diagnosis. Students go on to law school, divinity school, architecture school, medical school, graduate school, consulting, business.
9. It's part of the liberal education that Thomas Jefferson envisioned that citizens should know about religion, as we will see from his letters.
10. There is a good mix of lecture and discussion.
11. Some students ranked this the best course they took in college.
12. The course needs a variety of backgrounds to work.

REL 503/695: Eastern Orthodox Theology/Independent Study - R, 4 PM - 6:50 PM ~ *R, 7 PM - 9:50 PM

Designed for doctoral and post-masters students or Religious Studies majors with a high A average and an advanced interest in Orthodox theology. Seek instructor's permission by email. Readings include Ephrem the Syrian, Romanos the Melodist, saints’ lives, Pseudo-Dionysios, icon veneration, Maximus the Confessor, Symeon the New Theologian, Gregory Palamas (maybe), Pavel Florensky, and Sergei Bulgakov. Knowledge of Greek, Syriac, or Russian helpful but not necessary.
REL 298: Thinking About Religion - T/R, 12:30 PM - 1:45 PM
This course is required of all Religious Studies majors. This course is not strictly introductory, and expects that students have some familiarity with the academic study of religion before taking the course. Ideally, it will be a third or fourth course in the major, taken within a semester of declaring the major.

This course takes an imaginative and critical approach to introduce Religious Studies by focusing on case studies that illustrate how diverse religious ideas and practices may be interpreted as ways of map-making. Additionally, this course investigates how Religious Studies “maps” religious phenomena. Cases studies will be used to demonstrate how religious life in different times and places has been shaped by the dynamic interplay of social, political, economic, environmental, aesthetic, and personal factors, and by peoples’ efforts to represent or “map” this interplay in order to bring meaning, purpose, and order to their personal and collective lives. In considering these religious mappings, the course will also attend to the ways in which students of religion are themselves map-makers and users. The course introduces the methods and materials that scholars, as students of religion, use to make sense of the religious worlds of their and other cultures.
REL 104: Religion, Ritual, and the Arts: Poetry, GPR, WI - Online

Through exploration of major themes, motifs, and narratives found in texts from cultures around the world, students will learn to define—and thereby challenge definitions of—what is considered “sacred” and even what is considered “poetry” in historical and contemporary literature. While poetry is the primary literary focus, students will also encounter various prose texts and film intended to expand, debate, and shift traditional ideas of the sacred. A semester-long poetry response journal and research portfolio will be completed as students engage in critical evaluation of sacred texts, authors and audiences, and the socio-cultural contexts that inform and influence them.