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Program Overview

Graduate students in Religion in the Americas examine the history of religious thought, cultures, institutions, movements, symbols, performances, and lived religious experience in the Americas. Students may also consider aspects of religious life in the contemporary Americas from an historically informed perspective.

The Religion Department's graduate curriculum provides students with a grounding in theory and method in the study of religion with courses that foster conversation across the fields of concentration within the department.

Courses within the Religion in the Americas subfield, including American Religion to 1865, Religion in Modern American History and Culture, and African American Religious History, are foundation courses that introduce students to the history and historiography of the field. Other courses address topics in the field, such as Inventing "Religion" and "Indians," Religion and Sexuality in America; The Social Gospel in America; The Visual and Material Cultures of American Religion; Race, Religion, and the Harlem Renaissance; American Religious Utopias and Communitarian Experiments; Religious Authority in America.

We encourage students to take courses in other departments and programs that support their primary research focus or to gain background in other areas to support future teaching or other career goals.

Graduate students in Religion in the Americas may also earn certificates in African American Studies, Environmental Studies, Gender and Sexuality Studies, Latin American Studies, Media and Modernity, or Urban Policy. Research support for students in the subfield is available from the Center for Culture, Society and Religion, the Effron Center for the Study of America, the Council of the Humanities, among other university sources.

Graduate Program

Religion in the Americas

Degree Requirements

All degree candidates are expected to have a reading knowledge of the two modern foreign languages most appropriate to their fields of concentration.

After completing two years of coursework, students complete the General Examinations, which consist of four units. Two of these cover religious history and historiography in the Americas from colonial contact to the twenty-first century. The third examination takes the form of a paper that demonstrates facility with primary sources in light of the historiography of a particular period. The fourth General Examination is a historiographical and methodological essay that takes on a critical problem or question in the field and is intended to establish the groundwork for a dissertation prospectus.

For the dissertation, students devise an area of research in consultation with faculty.

Normally, all graduate students serve as Assistants in Instruction at some point in their careers, leading precept discussion sections in undergraduate courses and grading student work in courses in the subfield, department, and in other departments and programs.

Recent dissertations include:

- Born Again Queer: Evangelical Gay Activism and the Construction of Antigay Christianity, 1968-1988
- Unpublishing Religion: How Anglo-Protestant Printing Constrained Public Speech in Early America
- Just and Grave Causes: Decline as Religious Change in Catholic Philadelphia
- Religion at Time Inc.: From the Beginning of *Time* to the End of *Life*
- Gods of the Flesh: Religio-Racial Networks between the Global South and Black New Orleans, 1915-1954
- Spiritual Rehabilitation: Religion and Cognitive Disability in Postwar America

Special Features

The weekly Religion in America Workshop brings together graduate students, faculty, postdoctoral fellows, and scholars invited from other institutions to discuss works-in-progress. Recent visitors include Lloyd Barba, Elizabeth Fenton, Terrence Keel, Jennifer Graber, Zareena Grewal, Sarah Imhoff, Kathryn Gin Lum, Lerone Martin, Robert Orsi, Elizabeth Pérez, and Daisy Vargas.

The subfield sponsors additional guest lectures and conferences. Recent conferences include:

- Art and Devotion: New Accounts of Religious Culture, Race, and Gender in the United States
- Race and Religion in American History
- Race and Religion in the Americas and the Atlantic World
- Religion and the American Normal
- Sexuality and Religion in America
- Space, Time, and Religion in Early America

After Princeton

Recent graduates of the Religion in the Americas program hold tenure track positions at Dartmouth College, Georgia State University, Harvard Divinity School, Kalamazoo College, Saint Louis University, San Francisco State University, Transylvania University, the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, and the University of Southern California. These and other graduates have also held visiting positions at a range of colleges and universities, in addition to post-doctoral fellowships. Yet others are using their degrees outside of the academy, including employment in non-profit work.

The Director of Graduate Studies and the Religion in the Americas faculty work together to support students in finding positions, and the Graduate School and the Center for Career Development provide additional resources for exploring careers.

Faculty

Wallace D. Best

Hughes-Rogers Professor of Religion and African American Studies

Best is a specialist in African American religious history with research interests in Pentecostalism, religion and literature, religion and sexuality, and Womanist theology. He is the author of *Langston's Salvation: American Religion and the Bard of Harlem* (2017) and *Passionately Human, No Less Divine: Religion and Culture in Black Chicago, 1915-1952* (2005).

Seth Perry

Associate Professor of Religion

Perry's research interests include print culture, American religious history broadly, and the creation of individual religious authority. He is the author of *Bible Culture and Authority in the Early United States* (2018).

Garry Sparks

Associate Professor of Religion

Sparks focuses on ethnohistorical understandings of theological production in the Americas, particularly by Indigenous peoples and on first contact between Native Mesoamericans and Iberian missionaries in the sixteenth century. He is the author of *The Americas' First Theologies: Early Sources of Post-Contact Indigenous Religion* (2017) and *Rewriting Maya Religion: Domingo de Vico, K'iche' Maya Intellectuals, and the Theologia Indorum* (2019).

Nicole Myers Turner

Assistant Professor of Religion

Turner is a specialist in African American religion, politics, and gender in the nineteenth century and she mobilizes Africana Studies and Black Digital Humanities methods in her work. She is the author of *Soul Liberty: The Evolution of Black Religious Politics in Postemancipation Virginia* (2020).

Judith Weisenfeld

Agate Brown and George L. Collord Professor of Religion

Weisenfeld is a specialist in African American religious history with research interests in film and popular culture, women, gender, and sexuality, religion in cities, and religion and race. She is the author of *New World A-Coming: Black Religion and Racial Identity during the Great Migration* (2016), *Hollywood Be Thy Name: African American Religion in American Film, 1929-1949* (2007) and *African American Women and Christian Activism: New York's Black YWCA, 1905-1945* (1997).