

RELIGION DEPARTMENT
2024 – 2025 Spring
COURSE OFFERINGS

UNDERGRADUATE COURSES:

REL 226/EAS 226: The Religions of China

(EM) Graded A-F, P/D/F, Audit

Professor(s): Stephen Teiser

MW 10:00am – 10:50am

Area of Study Stream Requirement: Religions of Asia

A thematic introduction to Chinese religion, ranging from ancient to contemporary. The first half focuses on classics of Chinese philosophy (Book of Changes, Analects of Confucius, Daoist and Buddhist classics, etc.). The second half utilizes journalism, ethnography, films, social media, and author interviews to consider contemporary China, atheism, popular movements, state control of religion, cosmology, gods, saints, divination, gender, and ritual.

REL 230/ JDS 230: Who Wrote the Bible

(HA) Graded A-F, P/D/F, Audit

Professor(s): Liane Feldman

TTH 10:00am - 10:50am

Area of Study Stream Requirement: Ancient Judaism, Christianity, and Greek and Roman Religions

This course introduces the Hebrew Bible (Christian "Old Testament"), a complex anthology written by many people over nearly a thousand years. In this class, we will ask questions about the Hebrew Bible's historical context and ancient meaning, as well as its literary profile and early reception. Who wrote the Bible? When and how was it written? What sources did its authors draw on to write these stories? And to what circumstances were they responding? Students will develop the skills to critically analyze written sources, and to understand, contextualize, and critique the assumptions inherent in modern treatments of the Bible.

REL 235 /NES 235: The Ethics of War and Peace in Islam

(EM) Graded A-F, P/D/F, Audit

Professor(s): Shaun Marmon

TTH 12:30p - 1:20pm

Area of Study Stream Requirement: Islam

Western stereotypes often equate Islam with violence. The goal of this course is to dismantle stereotypes and to arrive at a more nuanced understanding of the Islamic ethics of war and peace, in theory and in practice. How have Muslim thinkers, past and present, debated the laws of war? What has warfare meant for ordinary people? What does "jihad" mean? Can a war be just? What have been the results of the so-called "war on terror"? We explore these questions and others through primary sources in translation (including poetry and novels), modern scholarship, and films. An optional trip to the Metropolitan Museum of Art is included.

REL 252 /CLA 252 /HLS 252: Jesus: How Christianity Began

(EC) Graded A-F, P/D/F, Audit

Professor(s): AnneMarie Luijendijk

TTH 11:00am – 11:50am

Area of Study Stream Requirement: Ancient Judaism, Christianity, and Greek and Roman Religions

Who was Jesus of Nazareth and how do we know about him? Why did certain interpretations of his message win out over others? How did the small, illicit Christian movement grow to attract numerous followers, reshaping the social, political, sexual, and religious landscape of the Roman Empire and cultures worldwide? To explore these questions, we will study the earliest gospels, letters, Jewish and Roman historical sources, prison writings, martyr narratives, and papyrus documents, as well as scholarly interpretations of these texts. No matter your religious background, you will gain valuable insights and be able to contribute to the discussion.

REL 255 /AAS 255 /HIS 255: Mapping American Religion

(HA) no audit

Professor(s): Nicole M. Turner

M 1:30pm – 4:20pm

Area of Study Stream Requirement: Religions in the Americas

This course merges research in American religious history with creating an archive using digital and deep mapping practices. It explores the politics of mapping, geography and race before delving into a place-based exploration of American religious communities during the late 19th century. The course asks, how do religious communities develop and construct space, foster and develop from movement? How are these processes influenced by the constructions of power reflected in defining religion, race and geography?

REL 263: Religion and its Modern Critics

(EC) Graded A-F, P/D/F, Audit

Professor(s): Gabriel M. Citron

TTH 3:30pm - 4:20pm

Area of Study Stream Requirement: Philosophical and Ethical Approaches to Religion**Satisfies Critical Approaches (CA) Requirement for Majors**

The most penetrating critiques of Christianity have the power to unsettle our sense of self and disrupt our most natural ways of being - for Christians and non-Christians alike. For these critiques don't focus on attacking religious beliefs alone; rather, they target many of the deepest values, attitudes, and tendencies at the core of Christianity and Christian-molded cultures, and perhaps even at the core of our humanity. This course explores some of the key 19th and 20th century critiques of Christianity. It will involve opening ourselves up to the self-reckoning demanded by the likes of Kierkegaard, Emerson, Nietzsche, Baldwin, and Butler.

REL 280 /EAS 281: Zen Buddhism

(CD or EM) Graded A-F, P/D/F, Audit

Professor(s): Bryan D. Lowe

MW 11:00am - 11:50am

Area of Study Stream Requirement: Religions of Asia

Most people have heard of Zen Buddhism, but what is it? Who gets to define it? This class looks at Zen in China, Korea, Germany, Japan, Vietnam, and the United States through a range of methods from reading classic texts to studying ethnographic accounts. By considering Zen in different times and places, we explore how a religion is shaped by its political and cultural environs. We examine tensions between romanticized ideals and practices on the ground and grapple with how to study complicated and sometimes troubling traditions. Topics include myths, meditation, mindfulness, monastic life, gender, war, and death.

REL 341: Beyond Belief: Theorizing Jewish Practice

(CD or EM) Graded A-F, P/D/F, Audit

Professor(s): Yedidah Koren

T 1:30pm - 4:20pm

Area of Study Stream Requirement: Ancient Judaism, Christianity, and Greek and Roman Religions

In this course we will focus on the rich body of Jewish norms and practices, the literature that discusses and prescribes them, and the diverse ways in which Jews have lived them out throughout history. We will highlight the embodied, material, mundane, and habitual aspects of Jewish practice and the ways in which they are enforced. We will also explore the common ground that Jewish norms (halakha) have with Islamic norms (sharia). Our focus on Jewish religiosity will bring us to examine the relationship between practice and belief as well as the very concept of "religion."

REL 359/LAS 388: Native American Creation Narratives

(HA) Graded A-F, P/D/F, Audit

Professor(s): Garry Sparks

MW 11:00am – 12:20pm

Area of Study Stream Requirement: Religions in the Americas

This class will concentrate on some of the earliest and most extensive religious and historical texts authored by Indigenous Peoples of the Americas, specifically by the Maya, Mexica (Aztec), Hopi, and Dine (Navajo). This set will allow for a critical and comparative study of Native rhetoric, mythic motifs, notions of space and time, morals, and engagements with non-Native peoples and Christianity.

REL 395 /SAS 395: Tantric Religion in South Asia

(EM or HA) Graded A-F, P/D/F, Audit

Professor(s): Guy T. St. Amant

TTH 1:30pm – 2:50pm

Area of Study Stream Requirement: Religions of Asia

This course introduces students to the Tantric traditions of premodern India through a close study of the idealized religious careers of Tantric initiates. It uses primary sources (in translation) to reconstruct the milestones, practices, and experiences that defined what it meant to be a member of a Hindu or Buddhist Tantric community. We will consider especially the broader religious context, Tantric initiation, and post-initiatory rituals involving yogic exercises, sexual practices, and violent sorcery. Students will also gain an understanding of the relationship between Hindu and Buddhist forms of Tantric scripture and practice.

GRADUATE COURSES

REL 504 /HLS 504 /CLA 519: Studies in Greco-Roman Religions: Individuation and the Self

Graded */aud

Professor(s): Moulie Vidas

T 1:30pm - 4:20pm

The historiography of ancient Mediterranean religion has often been bound with concepts such as the self, individuation, and privatization. These concepts have been used to explain developments in a broad range of areas, including Christian asceticism, Rabbinic Halakhah, literary authorship, the reconfiguration of rituals, and images of the afterlife. The very definition of this period has been tied to how it presented a "new care of the self" or an "interiorization" of religion. This seminar considers the opportunities and challenges these concepts pose by examining scholarship on the period and the evidence it seeks to explain.

REL 505 /AAS 505: Studies in Religion in America: Race and Religion in America

Graded */aud

Professor(s): Judith Weisenfeld

W 1:30pm - 4:20pm

This course examines how the modern constructed categories of "race" and "religion" have interacted in American history and culture. We explore how religious beliefs and practices have shaped ideas about race and how American racialization has shaped religious experience. We consider the impact of religion and race on notions of what it means to be American and how these have changed over time. Topics include race and biblical interpretation; religion and racial slavery; religion, race, and science; popular culture representations; race, religion, and politics; and religious resistance to racial hierarchy.

REL 506: Studies in Theology: Israel and the Nations

Graded */aud

Professor(s): Eric Gregory & Leora Batnitzky

TH 1:30pm - 4:20pm

Much of recent Jewish and Christian thought has focused on arguments defending the respective particularity of the Jewish and Christian traditions. With special attention to debates about God's people, the problem of election, the relation between religious and national identities, and the significance of the Apostle Paul, this seminar examines the historical and theological contexts of these arguments as well as their philosophical, ethical, and political implications

REL 511: Special Topics in the Study of Religion: Critical Readings in Slavery and Religion

Graded */aud

Professor(s): Shaun E. Marmon

W 1:30pm - 4:20pm

How have scholars in slavery studies interrogated the intersection of religion and slavery? Does the "slaving zones" model rule out the role of race in pre-modern enslavement? How did slaves negotiate their enslaved lives within the religious cultures of their enslavers? How did gender inflect the lives of slaves and the religious discourses of enslavement? We will address these questions by reading primary sources in translation, and scholarly studies of slavery in different historical contexts and within different religious traditions. Guest speakers will participate.

REL 517: Culture, Society and Religion Workshop

Graded */aud

Professor(s): Jonathan C. Gold, Jenny Wiley Legath, Lauren K. McCormick

M 12:00pm - 1:20pm

Presentation and critical discussion of research in progress by participants, dealing with the study of religion in any field within the humanities and social sciences. Note: REL 517 (fall) and REL 517 (spring) constitute this year-long workshop. In order to receive credit, students must take the course both semesters.

REL 519: Religion and Critical Thought Workshop

Graded */aud

Professor(s): Gabriel Citron

W 2:30pm - 4:00pm

A weekly, year-long workshop focused on current student and faculty research in religion and critical thought, designed primarily for graduate students working on dissertations and general examination essays on the philosophy of religion,

religious ethics, and the role of religion in politics. Note: REL 518 (fall) and REL 519 (spring) constitute this year-long workshop. In order to receive credit and/or a grade, students must take the course both semesters.

REL 524: Religion in the Americas Workshop

Graded */aud

Professor(s): Garry Sparks

TH 3:00pm - 4:20pm

A weekly, year-long workshop focused on the current research of visiting presenters, current students, and faculty in American religious history. Designed primarily for Ph.D. students in the field, but is open as well to undergraduate concentrators with a strong background in the study of American religion and culture. Note: REL 523 (fall) and REL 524 (spring) constitute this year-long workshop. In order to receive credit and/or a grade, students must take the course both semesters.

REL 526: Religions of Late Antiquity Workshop

Graded */aud

Professor(s): Liane Feldman

T 12:00pm - 1:20pm

A weekly, year-long workshop providing students in the Religions of Late Antiquity with the opportunity to present their current research for discussion. Note: REL 525 (fall) and REL 526 (spring) constitute this year-long workshop. In order to receive credit and/or a grade, students must take the course both semesters.

REL 530: Workshop in Islamic Studies

Graded */aud

Professor(s): Tehseen Thaver

T 1:30pm - 3:00pm

A weekly year-long Religion workshop focusing on the research and writing of graduate students, faculty, and visitors in Islamic Studies. This workshop provides a forum for presentation of works in progress: drafts of dissertation chapters, dissertation proposals, seminar papers, conference papers, articles and book chapters. All Islamic Studies graduate students are encouraged to participate as presenters and as commentators. The workshop fosters collegiality and professional development. Note: REL 529 (fall) and REL 530 (spring) constitute this year-long workshop. Students must take the course both semesters to receive credit/grade.

REL 531: Readings in Chinese Religions: Dunhuang Manuscripts & Chinese Buddhism

Graded */aud

Professor(s): Stephen Teiser

TH 1:30pm - 4:20pm

Close reading of Chinese Buddhist texts surviving among the Dunhuang manuscripts. Introduction to the Dunhuang corpus, paleography, codicology, & research tools. Survey of different genres: canonical sutras & commentaries, indigenous sutras, miracle tales, sectarian literature, ritual handbooks, documents of lay congregations, performance literature (sutra lectures, transformation texts, etc.), temple administration, etc.

REL 533/EAS 535: Readings in Japanese Religions: Buddhist Exchange between the Continent and Japan

Graded */aud

Professor(s): Bryan Lowe & Akiko Walley

F 1:30pm - 4:20pm

This seminar explores the visual and material culture of Japanese Buddhism during the eighth century through close examination of objects and documents with a focus on the Shosoin. We read primary sources and secondary scholarship including inventories, bureaucratic records, official histories, and Buddhist scriptures to show how Buddhism in the Nara capital and provinces was mediated by the production and dissemination of devotional objects. Significant time is spent on translation, as well as research methods necessary for the study of premodern Japanese Buddhism and art. Readings require basic familiarity with classical Chinese or kanbun.

REL 538: Studies in Tibetan Religions: Buddhist Lineages

Graded */aud

Professor(s): Jonathan C. Gold

M 1:30pm - 4:20pm

This course introduces Tibetan Buddhist traditions based on sources in translation, emphasizing the historical development of the major lineages and their distinctive practice traditions. Course topics will include Tibetan tantric systems and rituals; Tibetan innovations in and approaches to Buddhist philosophy; Tibet's distinctive approach to religion and politics; Tibetan views of space and locality; Tibetan scholasticism; and the challenges posed by modernity and Chinese rule.

REL 557: Reading Coptic Texts

Graded */aud

Professor(s): Sophia Torallas Tovar

MW 9:30am – 11:00am

This course will serve as a continuation of REL 555: Intro to Coptic Language and Literature. The focus of this term will be on building Coptic reading competency. The class will focus on reading a selection of Coptic texts in Sahidic and samples in other dialects and will serve as a basic introduction to the generic and literary forms of this corpus. We will read texts both in English translation and prepare shorter selections of the Coptic for each session. Students will walk away from the course with stronger reading comprehension as well as a knowledge about the theologies, philosophies, and historical contexts of the ancient codices.

REL 580/NES 560: Major Trends and Debates in Islamic Studies

Graded */aud

Professor(s): Tehseen Thaver

TH 1:30pm - 4:20pm

This course engages certain major trends, debates, and questions that populate the field of Islamic Studies today, broadly defined. A central objective of this course is to think carefully about ways in which anthropological and other theoretical perspectives currently operative in the field might enrich more textually oriented approaches to the study of Islam, and vice versa. In addition, this course allows students to explore the question of how their research projects fit into and intervene in the broader landscape of Religious Studies and Islamic Studies.

CROSSLISTED

ART 526/REL 540: Arts of Enlightenment: Buddhist Materialities in East Asia

Graded A-F, P/D/F, Audit

Professor(s): Rachel Saunders

T 1:30pm – 4:20pm

How does stone become sacred, or lumber enlivened? Where is the Buddha Body in a decorated sutra? Why were so many ink paintings produced in the name of Zen, which declares images unnecessary? This seminar examines the history of Buddhist art-making and visualization practices from the earliest representations of the Buddha to the curatorial practices of modern museums. We will foreground sensorial qualities and modes of making as we investigate the roles of aura, iconicity, and (in)visibility in the lives of efficacious objects. The class includes field trips to collections on campus and beyond to examine original works of art.

PHI 358 /REL305: Buddhist Philosophy

Graded A-F, P/D/F, Audit

Professor(s): Staff

MW 10:00am – 10:50am

In this course, we critically examine some of the core issues in metaphysics, epistemology, philosophy of language and ethics that are elaborated by Buddhist philosophers. The course analyzes core texts of Buddhist philosophy supported by secondary literature. Once we gain an understanding of the views expounded by Buddhist philosophers, we will subject their doctrines to rational scrutiny. The course will also incorporate guided meditations from a range of different Buddhist practices and give you the choice of experimenting and reflecting on your experience as part of your assessment

For more detailed information on each course, please visit:

<http://registrar.princeton.edu/course-offerings/>