

Religious Studies

Humanities Division

We understand the study of religion as a crucial element in the larger study of culture and history. We consider the study of religion to be inherently interdisciplinary and a necessary component for intercultural literacy and, as such, essential to the liberal arts curriculum. Our goals include helping students to recognize and examine the important role of religion in history and the contemporary world; to explore the wide variety of religious thought and practice, past and present; to develop methods for the academic study of particular religions and religion in comparative perspective; and to develop the necessary skills to contribute to the ongoing discussion of the nature and role of religion.

Since the phenomena that we collectively call "religion" are so varied, it is appropriate that they be studied from a variety of theoretical perspectives and with a variety of methods. The diversity of areas of specialization and approaches to the study of religion among our faculty members ensures the representation of many viewpoints. Our courses investigate the place of religion in various cultures in light of social, political, economic, philosophical, psychological and artistic questions. We encourage religious studies majors to take relevant courses in other departments. The Department of Religious Studies maintains close relationships with interdisciplinary programs such as Asian and Middle East studies, American studies, African diaspora studies, international studies, and women's and gender studies. Our courses require no commitment to a particular faith. However, students of any background, secular or religious, can benefit from the personal questions of meaning and purpose that arise in every area of the subject.

The Curriculum

The curriculum mirrors the diversity of the faculty. We offer courses in Judaism, Christianity, religions of the Americas, Islam, Buddhism, South Asian religions and East Asian religions. Religious studies majors are required to take courses in at least four of these areas. In our courses we emphasize work with primary sources, both textual and nontextual. To this end, students are encouraged to study relevant languages and to spend at least part of their junior year abroad in an area of the world relevant to their particular interests.

Our introductory courses (RLST 101, 102 and 103) are designed especially for students new to the study of religion, although they are not prerequisites to other courses. RLST 101 is a regular lecture/discussion class; RLST 102 covers the same material in the format of a seminar limited to first-year students; RLST 103, also a first-year seminar, covers equivalent material with a focus on women and religion. Students who enroll in any one of these and wish to fulfill their humanities requirement with religious studies courses may do so by taking any other course in the department. For this purpose we especially recommend our foundation courses (200-level), which can also serve as first courses in religious studies.

A few upper-level courses do have specific prerequisites, and a few with no specific course prerequisites do require sophomore or junior standing. Please refer to the course descriptions for further information. The 200-, 300- and 400-level courses do not need to be taken in sequence.

Requirements for the Major

Students majoring in religious studies are required to take a total of at least 10 courses. The courses should include the following:

I. Required courses for all majors

- RLST 101, 102 or 103 Encountering Religion
- RLST 390 Approaches to the Study of Religion
- RLST 490 Senior Seminar

II. Four foundation or survey courses, one from four of the five areas listed below

- Judaism
 - RLST 210 Creating Judaism
 - RLST 211 Jew-ish in a Modern World
 - RLST 215 The Bible and Its Interpreters
- Christianity
 - RLST 220 Faith of Christians
 - RLST 225 New Testament
- American Religions
 - RLST 230 Religion and Society in America
 - RLST 235 African Spirituality in the Americas
 - RLST 332 African American Religions
- Islam and South Asian Religions
 - RLST 240 Classical Islam
 - RLST 250 South Asian Religions
- Buddhism and East Asian Religions
 - RLST 260 Buddhist Thought and Practice
 - RLST 251 East Asian Religions

III. One course, 300 or 400 level, in one of the categories chosen from the areas above

IV. Two other elective courses in religious studies

Senior Capstone

The Senior Capstone in religious studies consists of two components:

- Senior Paper: A 15-20 page paper on a religious studies related topic of the student's choosing. The paper will be drafted as part of the "Senior Seminar" (taken during the fall semester of senior year) and then revised and submitted early in the spring semester. This paper will form the core of the student's presentation during the Senior Conference.
- Senior Conference: The Conference consists of panels of students who will discuss each other's Senior Papers. All departmental faculty will attend the Conference and other students and guests may be invited. All attendees will also have a chance to engage in discussion with students on their Senior Papers.

Honors

Students with an overall grade point average of 3.33 or better and 3.5 or better in religious studies courses are eligible to submit a proposal for an honors project. Honors candidates select a field of concentration entailing two to three courses of advanced research and writing under the supervision of one or more faculty members.

Requirements for the Minor

The religious studies minor is designed to expose students in a systematic way to the study of religion, while simultaneously giving them some degree of more advanced knowledge in at least one religious tradition. A total of five courses are required for the minor in religious studies. The following are the minimum requirements:

- 1- 100 or 400 level course, all of which serve to introduce students to multiple religious traditions as well as various theoretical approaches to the study of religion
- 4 other courses in the department

There are multiple pathways to fulfilling the minor requirements.

- Should a student desire to learn about a variety of religious traditions, themes, and theoretical questions, they can choose widely from the available course offerings.
- Should a student desire to focus on a single religious tradition or geographic region, that student should arrange to meet with the relevant faculty to devise a course plan. Students who focus on one particular tradition or region will be qualified to claim specialization (such as a minor in “Jewish studies” or “American religions”) upon resumes/curriculum vitae. In these cases, a 200 level foundation course in a tradition that the student is not specializing in may serve as a substitute for the 100/400 level course requirement.

Transfer Credit Policy

Courses taken abroad or as transfer credit may be counted towards major requirements, a maximum of two courses. Religious studies majors who wish to use these courses to satisfy requirements for the major must discuss them with their advisor and department chair, before taking courses. (For information on nondepartmental courses that may count towards the religious studies major, consult the department chair.)

Courses in Religious Studies

Encountering Religion in Its Global Context: An Introduction

RLST 101 CREDITS: 0.5

This course includes brief introductions to four or five major religious traditions, while exploring concepts and categories used in the study of religion, such as sacredness, myth, ritual, religious experience and social dimensions of religion. Traditions such as Judaism, Christianity, Buddhism, Islam, Confucianism, Taoism, Hinduism and Native American traditions are presented through their classic scriptures and traditional practices. Readings vary among sections but typically include important primary sources on Hindu thought and practice (e.g., the Upanishads, the Bhagavad-gita), Buddhist thought and practice ("The Questions of King Milinda," "The Heart Sutra"), Jewish life and thought (selections from the Hebrew Bible, "The Sayings of the Fathers"), Christian origins (one or more Gospels, selected Pauline letters), Islam (selections from the Qur'an and Sufi mystical poetry), Confucianism (the Analects), Taoism (the Tao Te Ching) and modern expressions of religion (e.g., Martin Buber's "I and Thou"). Many of the primary sources are studied in conjunction with relevant secondary sources (e.g., Rudolf Otto's "The Idea of the Holy," important articles by anthropologists of religion). This counts toward the core course requirement for the major. No prerequisite. Offered every semester.

First-Year Seminar: Encountering Religion

RLST 102 CREDITS: 0.5

This course covers the same material as RLST 101 and is open only to first-year students, giving first-years the opportunity to experience the rigorous and intimate seminar setting as they work through the topics and themes of the Religious Studies department's introductory course. This counts toward the core course requirement for the major. No prerequisite. Offered every year.

First-Year Seminar: Religion, Gender and Sexuality

RLST 103 CREDITS: 0.5

This course presents an introduction to the study of religion, using the lens of gender and sexuality as a category of analysis. Students will examine constructions of the body, sexuality/celebrity, control and agency of marginalized persons, issues of fertility and purity, and gender performativity. A variety of religious traditions will be explored as well as feminist and gender/sexuality theorists. Open only to first-year students, with the possibility of second-year students with permission of the instructor. This counts toward the core course requirement for the major. No prerequisite. Offered every two years.

Trials, Debates and Controversies

RLST 141 CREDITS: 0.5

This course aims at an in-depth exploration of controversial issues that marked turning points in Western religious history -- issues that resulted in trials and/or significant national debates. Each offering of the

course will engage some combination of the following: the trial of Galileo, the English Reformation, the trial of Anne Hutchinson in Puritan New England, the abolition debate leading up to the American Civil War, and contemporary controversies over abortion and same-sex marriage. (Other trials, debates or controversies may be introduced from time to time.) The course is built upon the pedagogical approach called "Reacting to the Past," developed by Barnard College history professor Mark Carnes. Students separate into at least two competing factions as well as a group of indeterminates (or persuadables). Each student is assigned a role based on a historical person or a composite of ideas that informed the particular issue. Students will assume, research and reenact the roles of the various participants in these controversies. The goal is to persuade others, especially the indeterminates, to vote for the outcome that one's role specifies. This counts as an elective for the major. No prerequisite. Offered every two years.

Creating Judaism

RLST 210 CREDITS: 0.5

This course introduces the process by which Judaism became a religious tradition, particularly in the late ancient and medieval world. This period marked the rise of rabbis as an authoritative source of Jewish knowledge, tasked with updating biblical laws for their contemporary communities following the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple in 70 C.E.. This course will explain how rabbis created the major features of present-day Judaism, such as holidays, kosher and Sabbath laws, gender roles, charity/tzedakah, liturgy, and Jewish identity, at the same time as creating their own power and authority. Attention will be paid to Jewish debates, Jewish-Christian discourses, Jews as post-colonial subjects within historically contextual empires, and the ways ordinary Jews navigated rabbinic and non-Jewish power. By the end of this course, students will have a sense of how "traditional Judaism" was created. No prior knowledge of Hebrew or Judaism is necessary. This counts as a Judaism foundation course for the major. No prerequisite. Offered every two years.

Jew-ish in a Modern World

RLST 211 CREDITS: 0.5

This course introduces the changes in Judaism and Jewish life wrought by the advent of modernity and the Jewish Enlightenment (the Haskalah). We will first discuss developments in modern Jewish thought and the ways Jewish movements (such as Reform, Conservative, Orthodox, Reconstructing and Renewal Judaism) interacted with the classical Jewish tradition. The latter half of the class will examine the tensions and challenges to Judaism as a normative category in modernity, including intermarriage, conversion, the South American/African/Chinese Jewish diaspora, "cultural" Jews, Chismukkah, Israeli politics and secularism. Throughout the semester, we will ask: what does it take to be a Jew? What are the relationships between power, tradition, and non-Jewish culture that shape modern Jewish practice? Will Judaism survive modernity? This counts toward the Judaism requirement for the major. No prerequisite. Offered every two years.

The Bible and its Interpreters: Context and Reception of the Tanakh/Old Testament/Hebrew Bible

RLST 215 CREDITS: 0.5

This course is an introduction to the context and reception of the books which comprise the core of all Bible canons. The first half of this course will examine the Bible's textual formation, historical context, and the role memory played in the compilation and editing of its final form. Several key texts will be traced in their reception to Jewish, Christian, and Islamic traditions in the second half of this course, paying special attention to the ancient scribal process of "rewriting the Bible." We will analyze ancient techniques for textual interpretation, as well as examine the imaginal world of "sacred" biblical texts that informs different interpretive strategies. Open to students of all levels and recommended for students passionate about literature. This counts toward the Judaism requirement for the major. No prerequisite. Offered every two years.

Faith of Christians

RLST 220 CREDITS: 0.5

This course presents an inquiry into the main elements of the historical development, beliefs and practices of Christians and an examination of historical and modern Christian diversity on topics such as God, Christ and the Spirit, the church, the role of faith and the end-time. Students will read selections from the New Testament as well as selections from historical and contemporary Christian writers that address both traditional issues — such as the division of ordained clergy and laity and the role of women — and contemporary concerns, such as liberation theology and stem-cell research. This counts toward the Christianity requirement for the major. No prerequisite. Offered every year.

New Testament: Formation, Reception and Debates

RLST 225 CREDITS: 0.5

This course is an introduction to the literature of the New Testament. Primary texts in English translation will be read to understand the social, political and religious concerns of Christian writers of the first and second centuries. Students will learn about canon formation, problems of historical criticism and competing forms of Christianity within the ancient world (including differing views of Jesus within canonical and noncanonical writings). The course also will examine the relationships between Christianity and the Roman Empire, Christianity and Judaism, Christianity and Gnosticism and women within the New Testament. Methodologies currently practiced in biblical exegesis, including form criticism, redaction criticism, literary criticism and sociohistorical criticism are also introduced. Students must read assigned writings critically, analyzing structure, themes and the narrative voices of the texts to discover the distinctive literary and religious difference among New Testament writings. No previous familiarity with the New Testament is required. This counts toward the Christianity requirement for the major. No prerequisite. Offered every two years.

Religion and Society in America (U.S.)

RLST 230 CREDITS: 0.5

This course explores the religious history of the United States, with an emphasis on the relationship between religious beliefs/values and broader social and political processes. We first examine the attempt of European immigrants to establish church-state compacts in New England and Virginia, while the middle colonies adopted a more pluralistic approach. Next we survey the period between the American Revolution and the Civil War, looking at the separation of church and state, the growth of religious pluralism and the continued existence of the "Peculiar Institution. We then look at how various social forces shaped religion in the United States from the Civil War to World War II: immigration, urbanization, prejudice and the Social Gospel; expansionism and missions; and modernism and fundamentalism. Finally, we examine the shaping of the American religious landscape from World War II to the present through such forces as religious revitalization, activism for personal and civil rights, new waves of immigration and new communication media. This counts toward the American Religions requirement for the major. No prerequisite. Offered every other fall.

African Spirituality in the Americas

RLST 235 CREDITS: 0.5

This course explores the contours of the religious expressions of the African diaspora in the Americas. It will survey various Orisha traditions in Cuba, Brazil, the United States and Trinidad and Tobago; Regla de Palo and Abakua in Cuba; Kumina in Jamaica; Vodou in Haiti and the United States; Afro-Christian traditions in Jamaica, Trinidad and Guyana; and Rastafari in Jamaica and beyond. The course will pay close attention to the social history of these traditions, their understanding of the universe, their social structure and their rituals and ceremonies. This course provides students with an understanding of the formation and history, major beliefs and ceremonies, leadership and community structure, and social and cultural significance of these religious traditions. This counts toward the American Religions requirement for the major. No prerequisite. Offered every two years.

Islam's Diverse Paths: An Introduction to the Islamic Tradition

RLST 240 CREDITS: 0.5

This course serves as an introduction to the religion of Islam, a diverse tradition that includes more than a billion adherents and is a dominant cultural element in a geographical region that stretches from Morocco to Indonesia. This course focuses primarily on the development of Islam and Islamic institutions from the

time the Prophet Muhammad through the emergence of the Sufi tradition as a primary expression of Muslim piety in the late medieval period. Special attention will be given to the rise and development of Sunni, Shi'i and Sufi pieties as distinctive responses to the event of the Qur'anic revelation throughout the history of Islam. This counts toward the Islam and South Asian religions requirement course for the major. No prerequisite. Offered every fall.

African American Religions

RLST 242 CREDITS: 0.5

This course seeks to combine a survey of the history of African-American religious experiences with an exploration of various themes emerging from that history. Special attention will fall on the social forces shaping such experiences; the influence of African-American religious commitments on their cultural, social and political activities; and the diversity of religious experiences and expressions among African Americans. The survey will encompass African religious heritage and its relevance in America; the religious life of slaves on the plantations and rise of independent African-American churches in both the North and the South; the role of African-American churches during Reconstruction and Jim Crow; the emergence of diverse African-American religious traditions and movements in the first half of the 20th Century; African-American religion in the civil rights era; and current trends and issues in African American religion and spirituality. Some of the themes that will occupy our attention include religion and resistance; religion and cultural formation; African American Christian missions; the Back-to-Africa Movement; the aesthetics of worship in African-American churches; class, gender and social mobility; and religion and political activism. We will employ a combination of primary and secondary readings along with audiovisual materials in exploring the development of and the issues in African-American religious experiences. This counts toward the American Religions requirement for the major. No prerequisite. Offered every other fall.

Hinduism in its Religious Context: An Introduction to South Asian Religions

RLST 250 CREDITS: 0.5

The South Asian subcontinent has been the home of a fascinating array of religions and religious movements. Focusing on Hinduism, this course will examine the development of religious practice in South Asia and the interaction of competing religious ideas over time. The course will include discussions of Indus Valley religion, Vedic Brahmanism, Jainism and Buddhism, the Upanishads, classical Hinduism, Bhakti, Islam and modern Hinduism. This counts toward the Islam and South Asian religions requirement for the major. No prerequisite. Offered every other year.

East Asian Religions

RLST 251 CREDITS: 0.5

This course surveys the religions of East Asia, including Buddhism, Confucianism, Daoism, Shinto, Christianity, and the shamanic practices of China, Korea and Japan. We will read primary literature in its conceptual and historical contexts and study major themes that cross national and religious boundaries, such as gender, space and landscapes, ritual and political power. This counts toward the Buddhism and East Asian Religions requirement for the major. Offered every other year.

Parting of the Ways: The Formation of Judaism and Christianity

RLST 255 CREDITS: 0.5

This course is an introduction to the formation of Judaism and Christianity in the Ancient Mediterranean, focusing on their shared developments, tensions and relationships. What aspects of their religious worlds did Jews and Christians share? What were the continuities and disruptions on their stances on issues ranging from communal authority, scriptural interpretation, ritual action and tolerance? How did they confront social issues like gender, ethnicity, legal power and poverty? We will explore these and other questions by focusing on a variety of approaches ranging from "lived religion," material culture, contemporary readings of critical theory and others. We will devote our attention to pre-modern and modern examples of these interactions. This counts as a Judaism or Christianity foundation course for the major. No prerequisite. Offered every two to three years.

Buddhist Thought and Practice

RLST 260 CREDITS: 0.5

Buddhism has been one of the major connective links among the varied cultures of South, Southeast and East Asia for over two millennia, and in this century it has established a solid presence in Europe and North America. This course surveys the ideas and practices of Buddhism in South Asia, East Asia and Tibet, and ends with an introduction to Buddhism's transmission to the West. Readings include both primary texts and secondary sources. This counts toward the Buddhism and East Asian religions requirement for the major. No prerequisite. Offered every year.

Yearning for Zion: Hopes and Realities

RLST 311 CREDITS: 0.5

This course offers an examination of some aspects of the vast and complex Jewish nationalist movement, Zionism. Encounters between Jews, Palestinians and Arabs will serve as a thematic current throughout our study. Resources include primary and secondary sources, poetry, fiction, photographs, film and music. An array of voices from the 19th and early 20th centuries will serve to demonstrate the discontent and alienation that led to the development of Zionism in Europe. We will then consider Jewish writers who expressed caution and concern, anticipating barriers to peaceful coexistence between Jews and Arabs even decades before the dream of a Jewish state became reality in 1948. Today Jews and Palestinians continue to grapple with many unresolved issues, and we will turn our attention to their voices in the last five weeks of the semester. This counts as an elective for the major. Permission of instructor required. No prerequisite. Offered every two or three years.

Defense Against the Dark Arts in the Jewish Tradition

RLST 315 CREDITS: 0.5

Jews from antiquity to modernity have sought to control and defend themselves against unseen forces teeming around them. Whether through the crafting of amulets and spells, mystical incantations to ascend to heaven or bind angels to their will, or powerful knowledge of witchcraft and talismans, Jews have dabbled in the enchanted as a defense against the darkness in their world. This course examines the Jewish magical tradition from antiquity through the Middle Ages and investigates how it survived and underwent transformation in the modern world. We will examine different Jewish definitions of magic and ritual power to analyze the occasions when such practices were deemed acceptable or wholly outside normative Jewish practice. This course will interrogate conceptions of mysticism and magic, their relationship with "religion" and "philosophy," contextualize Jewish magical practices alongside their neighbors and will conclude by examining the reception of Jewish mysticism into the modern West. This counts as an elective for the major. No prerequisite. Offered every two or three years.

Medieval Christianity

RLST 320 CREDITS: 0.5

We will examine major works by central figures involved in the development of the medieval world-view: theological disputes, mysticism, interreligious dialogue, new forms of religious community, feminine spirituality and humanism. We will look at key issues — nature, community, salvation, God, knowledge and love — that were of common interest to theologians, philosophers, mystics and popular religion. Authors we will read include Augustine, Benedict, Abelard, Francis of Assisi, Bonaventure, Aquinas, Julian of Norwich and Dante. This counts as an elective for the major. No prerequisite. Offered every two or three years.

Christianity in the Global South

RLST 325 CREDITS: 0.5

At the threshold of the 21st century a series of political, social, cultural and demographic shifts locate over sixty percent of adherents of Christianity in the Global South (Africa, Latin America and Asia). This course explores these shifts by offering a historical and regional survey and analysis of Christianity in the Global South (along with its contacts with the Global North). The course will engage with detailed test cases from each region with an interdisciplinary outlook, emphasizing the richness and diversity of what we can call "World Christianities." The students will gain a sense of Christianity as a conglomerate of polycentric and

culturally diverse traditions and of the challenges that Christians in the Global South face in the contemporary world. The course devotes special attention to the emergence of new Christian movements, the development of liberation theologies, colonial and postcolonial struggles and the complex processes of identity formation of Christians in the Global South. This counts as an elective for the major. No prerequisite.

Christian Mysticism

RLST 329 CREDITS: 0.5

This course explores the evolution and development of the Christian mystical traditions from the origins of Christianity to today. It analyzes the philosophical traditions based upon neo-Platonic theories and the development of monasticism as well as popular and ecstatic mystical practices. One goal of the course is to problematize the term "mysticism" and trace its linguistic and philosophical development through the 19th and 20th centuries. Questions we will be asking include: Is mysticism a solitary or a communal experience? Do mystics who engage in somatic practices (such as copious weeping, bleeding or fasting) represent a "less pure" variant of mysticism than those who prefer solitary contemplation? Questions of gender also are pertinent, as women's access to the philosophical traditions was more limited than men's. We also will explore the role of mystical traditions in contemporary "mainstream" Christianity. What does mysticism look like today? This counts as an elective for the major. No prerequisite. Offered every two years.

Religious Fundamentalism in the Contemporary World

RLST 335 CREDITS: 0.5

This course is designed to explore the resurgence of religion in the contemporary world. More specifically, we will discuss the phenomenon of "fundamentalism" within the major world religions and its influence on national and international politics. Early in the course, we will discuss the theory of secularization, the recent resurgence of religion in public life, and some literature theorizing the phenomenon of fundamentalism and religious nationalism. We will then turn to the reading and discussing texts on Hindu Nationalism, Buddhism Nationalism, Jewish Fundamentalism, Christian Right in the United States, and Islamism. We will conclude by reflecting on what Mark Juergensmeyer calls "The Logic of Religious Violence" (Terror in the Mind of God). No prerequisite. Offered every fall.

Seminar on Sufism

RLST 340 CREDITS: 0.5

This course will examine some of the important ideas, personalities and institutions associated with Islamic mysticism. Students will read and discuss important primary and secondary sources on such topics as the development and organizations of Sufi tariqahs, Sufi mystical poetry, the nature of the Sufi path and Sufi psychology. A crucial aspect of the course will be an examination of the role of the veneration of "holy persons" in Islamic piety. This counts toward an elective for the major. No prerequisite. Offered every two years.

Religion and Popular Music in the African Diaspora

RLST 342 CREDITS: 0.5

Religious spaces, ideas and practices have exerted a formative influence on the cultures of the people of African descent in the Americas. Nowhere is this more evident than in the musical traditions of the African diaspora. This course will examine the relationship between African diaspora religious expressions and popular music in the United States and the Caribbean. It will focus primarily on the African-American (U.S.) musical traditions, rara from Haiti, calypso from Trinidad and Tobago, and reggae from Jamaica. Special attention will be given to the religious roots of these musical expressions and their social functions in shaping identity and framing religious, cultural and political discourses. Readings, videos/DVDs and CDs, along with presentations and discussions, will assist us in the exploration of the various facets of our topic. This counts as an elective for the major. No prerequisite. Offered every two years.

Voices of Contemporary Islam

RLST 343 CREDITS: 0.5

This course will explore some of the crucial issues and debates in the contemporary Muslim world. Issues to be examined will include the compatibility of Islam with democracy, the connections between Islam and terrorism, the role of Wahhabism in the construction of contemporary Islamic movements, feminist movements within Islam, Islam and pluralism and Sufism in the contemporary context. The course will focus on primary sources, including writing by Khaled Abou el Fadl, Amina Wadud and Osama bin Laden. This counts as an elective for the major. Prerequisite: RLST 240 or HIST 166 or 264 or permission of instructor. Offered every two years.

Islam in North America

RLST 347 CREDITS: 0.5

This course will examine Islam in contemporary North America and Canada. It will explore such topics as the diversity of the Muslim community, the relevance and practice of Islamic law in a secular society, the problem of Islamophobia, and issues of race, ethnicity and gender among North American Muslims. This counts as an elective for the major. No prerequisite. Offered every two years.

Rastafari: Movement of the Jah People

RLST 352 CREDITS: 0.5

Emerging from an alienated and marginalized people trapped in the underside of Jamaica's colonial society, the early Rastas drew inspiration from the crowning of Haile Selassie I to sever cultural and psychological ties to the British colonial society that for centuries had disparaged African traditions and sought to inculcate European mores in Jamaicans of African descent. Furthermore, the early Rastas made the newly crowned potentate the symbol of their positive affirmation of Africa as their spiritual and cultural heritage. From its humble beginnings, the Rastafari movement has cemented itself in the religious and cultural life of Jamaica and has extended its influence around the world, garnering adherents in most major cities and in many outposts around the world. This course will expose students to the identity creation of Rastafari via the espousal of a particular view of the world and the fashioning of distinctive lifestyle. It will also explore the internal dynamics of the movement, its spread to disparate parts of the world, and its influence on cultural expressions in the Caribbean and beyond. This course will emphasize close reading, analytical writing and guided discussion. We will make use of videos (video clips) and reggae music to elucidate aspects of the topic. This counts as an elective for the major. No prerequisite. Offered every two years.

Zen Buddhism

RLST 360 CREDITS: 0.5

This course covers the central ideas and practices of Zen Buddhism in China, where it originated and is called Chan; Japan, where it has influenced many aspects of Japanese culture and from where it was exported to the West; and the United States. Readings include both primary texts and secondary studies and are supplemented by films. This counts as an elective for the major. Prerequisite: RLST 260 or permission of instructor. Offered every three years.

Modern Buddhism

RLST 370 CREDITS: 0.5

This course explores key Buddhist people, concepts and movements around the world from the 19th to the 21st centuries. Topics of study may include: how Buddhism in traditionally Buddhist cultures has been shaped by modern political and social forces; how colonialism and its aftermath have influenced Buddhist institutions and practices; the application of Buddhist ideas to theories of race, gender and sexuality; the intersections of Buddhist practices and concepts (particularly meditative practices) with scientific and psychological discourses; the Critical Buddhism movement in Japan; and Engaged Buddhist movements. Our focus will be on primary texts, supplemented by secondary readings. This counts as an elective for the major. Prerequisite: RLST 260 or permission of instructor. Offered every other year.

Approaches to the Study of Religion

RLST 390 CREDITS: 0.5

This course acquaints students with major theoretical approaches to the academic study of religion. The course will cover phenomenological, psychoanalytical, sociological and anthropological approaches to religion. Authors to be discussed will include Frazer, Marx, Freud, Weber, Durkheim, Eliade, Lévi-Strauss, Douglas, Geertz and Turner. This counts toward the core course requirement for the major. No prerequisite. Offered every fall.

The Poor: From The Bible to Beyoncé

RLST 425 CREDITS: 0.5

This course investigates what it means to call someone “poor.” Recognizing the discursive properties of poverty as a category, we will trace the identification of “the poor” along with systems of charitable aid through four periods of history, emphasizing the role religion played in the development of ideas and institutions. We will study the Hebrew Bible’s justice traditions, the emergence of “the poor” as a distinct social category in the late Roman Empire, the charity revolution in the Medieval period, and the institutionalization of aid and philanthropy in recent American history — analyzing the ways people with power talk about the poor quite literally from the Bible to Beyoncé. With careful attention to artistic and textual primary sources, students will consider the role politics and religion play in who counts as “the poor.” This counts as an elective for the major. No prerequisite. Offered every two to three years.

Meanings of Death

RLST 470 CREDITS: 0.5

In all cultures, the idea of death and dying has shaped the imagination in myth, image and ritual. This course will explore the symbols, interpretations and practices centering on death in diverse religious traditions, historical periods and cultures. We will use religious texts (the Bible, Buddhist texts and Hindu scriptures), art, literature (Gilgamesh, Plato, Dante), psychological interpretations (Kubler-Ross) and social issues (AIDS, atomic weapons, ecological threats) to examine the questions death poses for the meaning of existence. This counts as an elective for the major. Prerequisite: sophomore standing. Offered every two years.

Confucian Thought and Practice

RLST 471 CREDITS: 0.5

This seminar explores the philosophical and cultural history of the Confucian tradition, primarily in China, from its inception to the present day. Readings include both primary texts and secondary studies covering the Five Classics and the sayings of Confucius and Mencius, the Neo-Confucians of the Song and Ming dynasties, and the “New Confucians” since the 20th century. Among the general questions to be considered are: In what senses can Confucianism be considered a religious tradition? How is Confucianism in China related to the tension between tradition and modernity? Which aspects of the tradition are culture-bound and which are universally applicable? The last four weeks will focus on a particular question of contemporary interest, such as the role of women in Confucianism or the question of human rights. Prerequisite: RLST 251 or HIST 161 or 263 or PHIL 212 or permission of instructor. Offered every three years.

Taoism

RLST 472 CREDITS: 0.5

This seminar examines the various expressions of Daoism (Taoism) in the Chinese religious tradition. Beginning with the classical Daoist texts of the third century BCE (often referred to as “philosophical Taoism”), we discuss the mythical figure of Laozi (Lao Tzu) and the seminal and enigmatic text attributed to him (Dao de jing), the philosopher Zhuangzi and the shadowy “Huang-Lao” Daoist tradition. We then examine the origins, beliefs, and practices of the Daoist religion with its hereditary and monastic priesthods, complex body of rituals, religious communities and elaborate and esoteric regimens of meditation and alchemy. Some of the themes and questions we will pursue along the way are: (1) the relations between the mystical and the political dimensions of Daoist thought and practice; (2) the problems surrounding the traditional division of Daoism into the “philosophical” and “religious” strands; (3) the relations between Daoism and Chinese “popular” religion; and (4) the temptation for Westerners

to find what they want in Daoism and to dismiss much of its actual belief and practice as crude superstition, or as a "degeneration" from the mystical purity of Laozi and Zhuangzi. This counts as an elective for the major. Prerequisite: RLST 251 (can be concurrent) or HIST 161 or 263 or permission of instructor. Offered every two years.

Religion for Robots: Cyborgs, Sci-Fi and Posthumanism

RLST 475 CREDITS: 0.5

Most recognized religions originated millennia before human discovery of electricity, let alone computer technology, and many predate printing, photography, radio and even writing. Yet many religions are practiced today with the aid of modern technologies and virtual religious and spiritual communities are increasingly the norm. How have the various changes in technology and media affected the practices and meanings of religion? Have religions been formed in the image of changing technologies, or do they transcend them? What is the future of religion and religions in a virtual world? This course will examine the history of the impact of technology and media on religion and the role of religion in the future. We'll look at, among other things, ethics in a virtual world, Afro-futurism, transhumanism in Jewish and Christian apocalypticism, lab-grown food and religious laws, the relevance of God and The Rapture in the Singularity, and what will become of karma when carbon-based persons merge with silicon-based entities and other advanced technologies. No prerequisite. Offered every two to three years.

Religious Communities

RLST 480 CREDITS: 0.5

This course examines traditional and innovative forms of monastic or communal religious life and spirituality. We read widely across space and time, studying varying traditions including Christian ascetic communities in third-fourth century North Africa, medieval Zen communities and contemporary Daoist communities in China, Orthodox Jewish communities in Israel and alternative spirituality communities in the United States. We also watch documentary films and narrative accounts of the ascetic or communal religious life. Prerequisite: sophomore standing. Offered every four years.

Religion and Nature

RLST 481 CREDITS: 0.5

This course examines various religious perspectives on the meaning and value of the natural world and the relationship of human beings to nature. The focus will be on environmental ethics in comparative perspective. We will look at Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, Taoism, Confucianism and Native American religions to see what conceptual resources they can offer to a contemporary understanding of a healthy relationship with the natural world. Prerequisite: any 100- or 200-level course in religious studies or permission of instructor. Offered every three years.

Senior Seminar

RLST 490 CREDITS: 0.5

This course is designed as a capstone experience in religious studies for majors in the department. Themes of the course will vary according to the instructor. Past themes have included religious autobiography, religion and cinema and new religious movements. Religious studies minors are encouraged to enroll, provided there is space. Non-majors should consult the instructor for permission to register. This counts toward the core course requirement for the major. Offered every fall.

Individual Study

RLST 493 CREDITS: 0.25 - 0.5

The department reserves individual studies to highly motivated students who are judged responsible and capable enough to work independently. Such courses might entail original research, but usually they are reading-oriented, allowing students to explore in depth topics that interest them or that supplement aspects of the major. Students may pursue individual study only if they have taken all the courses offered by the department in that particular area of the curriculum. An individual study course cannot duplicate a course or topic being concurrently offered. Exceptions to this rule are at the discretion of the instructor and department chair. Students must secure the agreement of an instructor to provide guidance and

supervision of the course. The instructor and student agree on the nature of the work expected (e.g., several short papers, one long paper, an in-depth project, a public presentation, a lengthy general outline and annotated bibliography). The level should be advanced, with work on a par with a 300- or 400-level course. The student and instructor should meet on a regular basis, with the schedule to be determined by the instructor in consultation with the student. Individual studies may be taken for 0.25 or 0.5 units, at the discretion of the instructor. A maximum of 0.50 units of IS may count towards major or minor requirements in RLST department. A student is permitted to take only one 0.5-unit class of IS in the department (one 0.5-unit course or two 0.25-unit courses). A student must present a petition with compelling reasons in order to obtain special permission to take an additional IS course. Because students must enroll for individual studies by the end of the seventh class day of each semester, they should begin discussion of the proposed individual study preferably the semester before, so that there is time to devise the proposal and seek departmental approval before the established deadline. Prerequisite: GPA of at least 3.0. Exceptions (e.g., languages not taught at Kenyon are granted at the discretion of the instructor, with the approval of the department chair.)

Senior Honors

RLST 497Y CREDITS: 0.5

Prerequisite: permission of department chair.

Senior Honors

RLST 498Y CREDITS: 0.5

Prerequisite: permission of department chair.

Studying Religion and Its Diverse Expressions

RLST 96 CREDITS: 0.25

The world around us is teeming with microorganisms, many of which are capable of bringing us to our knees. Despite this looming devastation, most individuals manage to remain healthy, not succumbing to the ever-present pathogens in our environment. For that, we must thank the immune system. Immunology is the study of the cellular and molecular mechanisms employed to protect against infection. The cells and organs of the immune system are many and they play varied important roles in health and development. Every day, components of the immune system must identify harmful invaders and eliminate them, a process that requires critical distinction between host vs. harmful cells. They also provide long-lived protection against recurring infection. In this class, we will embark on a journey through the immune system. We will explore the mechanisms employed by the innate immune system to provide first response to foreign invaders. Additionally, we will dissect the complex processes by which cells of the adaptive immune system recognize and respond to pathogens and establish long-term immunity. Lastly, we will explore the consequences of improper/impaired immune response in a variety of contexts. This counts toward the upper-level cellular/molecular biology requirement for the major. Prerequisite: BIOL 255, 263, 266 or 283.