Religious Studies

Chair: Susanna Morrill
Administrative Assistant: Claire Kodachi

As part of the Lewis & Clark programs in the humanities, the academic study of religion provides an opportunity for critical reflection on a key aspect of human culture, tradition, and experience. The extraordinary role religion has played throughout history as well as in contemporary societies provides the backdrop against which this critical inquiry takes place.

The Department of Religious Studies emphasizes the careful use of critical method along with clear and extensive writing as key tools of scholarly endeavor. As in any humanities program, students are encouraged to develop analytical skills that are of value in many graduate schools and professional fields. For students interested in Judeo-Christian origins, Lewis & Clark offers language courses in Greek, which serve as an integral part of their study and are especially important as preparation for upper-level work.

Resources for Nonmajors

All of the department’s offerings are open to nonmajors. Preference is given to majors for enrollment in RELS 201 History and Theory and 400-level seminars.

Courses at the 100 and 200 levels are designed as introductory or survey courses, and none presumes a background in the field or any personal experience on the part of participants. These courses are designed to introduce not only the subject areas but also the methods of academic inquiry in the field of religion. The 200-level courses are organized in four areas (see details of the major program) reflecting the diversity of the world’s religious traditions.

The majority of students taking religious studies courses are nonmajors pursuing elective interests. Many are students whose major academic interest is in another field such as art, music, history, politics, philosophy, or sociology, yet who find that some religious studies courses supplement and expand their understanding of their own fields.

Departmental Seminars

To give students opportunities to explore the departmental curriculum at an advanced level, seminars are offered each year in various areas of faculty expertise. Specific content of the seminars changes from year to year. Refer to the course list for those offered during recent academic years.

The Major Program

The field of religious studies is extremely diverse and thus the religious studies major is designed to give students a broad background in the field. The curriculum is organized in a series of levels:

100 level: Introduction to the academic study of religion.

200 level: Survey courses in four areas: Judeo-Christian origins, history of religions in the West, Islamic traditions, and religions of East Asia and India.

300 level: Exploration of specific topics introduced in 100- and 200-level courses.

400 level: Upper-division seminars in biblical studies, Western religious history, Asian religions, and Islamic traditions.

Major Requirements

A minimum of 40 semester credits (10 courses), distributed as follows:

- Four departmental core courses at the 200 level, from at least three of the following four areas: Judeo-Christian origins, the history of religions in the West, Islamic traditions, and the religions of East Asia and India.
- Four departmental courses at the 300 or 400 level (except RELS 490 Senior Thesis), at least one of which is a 450-level seminar.
- One methods course: RELS 201 History and Theory.
- The senior thesis: RELS 490 Senior Thesis.

Relevant courses from other departments or overseas programs may, on a case-by-case basis, be substituted for one of the above requirements. Approval for such substitutions is granted by the department chair; students are responsible for submitting the appropriate forms to the registrar.

Minor Requirements

A minimum of 20 semester credits (five courses), distributed as follows:

- Three departmental core courses (200 level), excluding RELS 299 Independent Study. RELS 201 History and Theory is recommended.
- Two courses at the 300 or 400 level, excluding RELS 499 Independent Study.

Faculty

Sylvia Frankel. Adjunct instructor in religious studies. Jewish studies.


RELS 101 Themes in Religious Studies
Faculty: Religious Studies Faculty.
Content: Introduction to various themes, theories, and methods in the academic study of religion. Selected topics illustrating how religious discourses are formed, develop, and interact with other spheres of human thought and action. Historical, literary, and sociological approaches to a variety of religious phenomena, such as scripture, religious biography, material culture, film, ritual performance.
Prerequisites: None.
Usually offered: Alternate Years.
Semester credits: 4.

RELS 201 History and Theory
Faculty: Cole, Kugler, Morrill, Powers.
Content: History of the field. Psychological, literary, anthropological, sociological, and historical approaches to the study of religion. Readings by major theorists. Should normally be taken no later than the junior year.
Prerequisites: None.
Restrictions: Sophomore standing required, unless section number is preceded by an "F."
Usually offered: Annually, fall semester.
Semester credits: 4.

RELS 224 Jewish Origins
Faculty: Kugler.
Content: Exploration of early Judaism, from circa 450 B.C.E. to 200 C.E. Focus on the development of the religion in the multicultural, pluralistic context of the Greco-Roman world. Study of the archaeological and written evidence for Jewish origins (i.e., the archaeology of Jerusalem, the Galilee, and the Dead Sea Scrolls community; the New Testament, the writings of "orthodox" and "heretical" early Christian thinkers, the Dead Sea Scrolls, and other relevant Judean texts). Analysis of key themes in early Christian studies (i.e., gender, orthodoxy and heterodoxy, early Christianity's relationship to early Judaism, Christianity and empire)
Prerequisites: None.
Restrictions: Sophomore standing required, unless section number is preceded by an "F."
Usually offered: Alternate Years, spring semester.
Semester credits: 4.

RELS 225 Christian Origins
Faculty: Kugler.
Content: Exploration of early Christianity, from the turn of the era to 400 C.E. Focus on the development of the religion in the multicultural, pluralistic context of the Greco-Roman world. Study of the archaeological and written evidence for Christian origins (i.e., the archaeology of Jerusalem, the Galilee, and the Dead Sea Scrolls community; the New Testament, the writings of "orthodox" and "heretical" early Christian thinkers, the Dead Sea Scrolls, and other relevant Judean texts). Analysis of key themes in early Christian studies (i.e., gender, orthodoxy and heterodoxy, early Christianity's relationship to early Judaism, Christianity and empire)
Prerequisites: None.
Restrictions: Sophomore standing required, unless section number is preceded by an "F."
Usually offered: Alternate Years, spring semester.
Semester credits: 4.

RELS 241 Religion and Culture of Hindu India
Faculty: Cole.
Content: Introduction to Hinduism in its Indian cultural context, with focus on theories of sacrifice, fertility, and discipline. Studies in classic Hindu sacred texts, with careful readings of myths of order and productivity. Analysis of reconstructed postcolonial Hinduism. Emphasis on studying religion from a critical and comparative perspective.
Prerequisites: None.
Restrictions: Sophomore standing required, unless section number is preceded by an "F."
Usually offered: Every third year, fall semester.
Semester credits: 4.

RELS 242 Religions and Cultures of East Asia
Faculty: Cole.
Content: Chinese and Japanese worldviews. Confucianism, Taoism, Buddhism, Shintoism: their origins, development, interactions. Mutual influence of folk and elite traditions, expansion of Buddhism and its adaptation to different sociopolitical environments, effects of modernization on traditional religious institutions.
Prerequisites: None.
Restrictions: Sophomore standing required, unless section number is preceded by an "F."
Usually offered: Every third year, fall semester.
Semester credits: 4.

RELS 243 Buddhism: Theory, Culture, and Practice
Faculty: Cole.
Content: Development of Buddhism in India and Tibet with emphasis on issues of purity, power, and asceticism as they are portrayed in classic Buddhist texts. Special attention given to Buddhist institutions and their rationales. Buddhist philosophy. Critiques of 20th-century misconceptions of Buddhism.
Prerequisites: None.
Restrictions: Sophomore standing required, unless section number is preceded by an "F."
Usually offered: Annually, spring semester.
Semester credits: 4.
RELS 244 Practicum  
Faculty: Religious Studies Faculty.
Content: Internship or practicum to be arranged with instructor.
Prerequisites: None.
Restrictions: Sophomore standing and consent required.
Usually offered: Annually, fall and spring semester.
Semester credits: 1-4.

RELS 251 Medieval Christianity  
Faculty: Westervelt.
Content: Formation and development of Western Christianity from late antiquity through the late medieval period (circa 250 to 1450 C.E.). The relation of popular piety to institutional and high cultural expressions of Christianity. Issues such as Christianity and the late Roman empire, the papacy, monasticism, religious art and architecture, and heresy and hierarchy discussed using theological texts, social histories, popular religious literature.
Prerequisites: None.
Restrictions: Sophomore standing required, unless section number is preceded by an "F."
Usually offered: Alternate Years, spring semester.
Semester credits: 4.

RELS 253 Religion in American History to the Civil War  
Faculty: Morrill.
Content: Introduction to major themes and movements in American religious history from colonial origins to the Civil War. Consideration of Native American religious traditions, colonial settlement, slavery and slave religion, revivalism, religion and the revolution, growth of Christian denominationalism, origins of Mormonism, using a comparative approach in the effort to understand diverse movements. Central themes: revival and religious renewal, appropriation of Old Testament language by various groups (Puritans, African Americans, Mormons), democratization of religion.
Prerequisites: None.
Restrictions: Sophomore standing required, unless section number is preceded by an "F."
Usually offered: Annually, spring semester.
Semester credits: 4.

RELS 254 Religion in Modern America, 1865 to Present  
Faculty: Morrill.
Content: Impact of religion in modern America from the end of the Civil War to the present day, emphasizing the interaction between America's many religions and emerging American modernity. The fate of "traditional" religion in modern America; "alternate" American religious traditions; urbanization, industrialism, and religion; science, technology, and secularism; evangelicism, modernism, and fundamentalism; religious bigotry; pluralism; new religions and neofundamentalism.
Prerequisites: None.
Restrictions: Sophomore standing required, unless section number is preceded by an "F."
Usually offered: Annually, fall semester.
Semester credits: 4.

RELS 261 Introduction to Judaism  
Faculty: Frankel.
Content: Classical texts and selected major thinkers of the Jewish tradition. Historical overview of the biblical and rabbinic periods with a look at classic Jewish texts: the Bible, Midrash, the Mishnah, the Gemara, the legal codes, the mystical tradition, and the Responsa literature. Major Jewish thinkers such as Maimonides, Abraham Joshua Heschell, David Hartman.
Prerequisites: None.
Restrictions: Sophomore standing required, unless section number is preceded by an "F."
Usually offered: Alternate Years, spring semester.
Semester credits: 4.

RELS 262 Judaism Encounters Modernity  
Faculty: Frankel.
Content: Exploration of how the emancipation period in Europe transformed the Jewish world, beginning in the latter part of the 18th century. Includes some of the early personalities, such as Moses Mendelssohn, Samson Raphael Hirsch, Leopold Zunz; the emergence of new denominations in Europe in the 19th century, such as the Reform and neo-Orthodox movements; and denominations developed in the United States in the 20th century.
Prerequisites: None.
Restrictions: Sophomore standing required, unless section number is preceded by an "F."
Usually offered: Annually, spring semester.
Semester credits: 4.
RELS 273 Islamic Origins
Faculty: Powers.
Content: Major religious and sociohistorical developments in the Islamic world from circa 600 to 1300 C.E. Focus on the Qur’an, Muhammad, early Islamic expansions and dynasties, and interactions with non-Muslims. Examination of the formation of orthodox beliefs and practices (e.g., theology, ritual, law), contestation over religious ideals and political power, and the emergence of Shi’ite and Sufi Islam.
Prerequisites: None.
Restrictions: Sophomore standing required, unless section number is preceded by an "F."
Usually offered: Annually, fall semester.
Semester credits: 4.

RELS 274 Islam in the Modern World
Faculty: Powers.
Content: The religious, social, and political dynamics of the Islamic world, circa 1300 C.E. to present, especially the 19th-21st centuries. Earlier developments (e.g., the Qur’an, Muhammad, Muslim dynasties) considered in relation to the modern context. European colonialism, postcolonial change, reform and "fundamentalist" movements, Sufism, Muslim views of "modernity," and changing understandings of politics, gender, and relations with non-Muslims.
Prerequisites: None.
Restrictions: Sophomore standing required, unless section number is preceded by an "F."
Usually offered: Annually, fall semester.
Semester credits: 4.

RELS 299 Independent Study
Faculty: Cole, Kugler, Morrill, Powers.
Content: Individual study directed by selected faculty. Determined in consultation with faculty, study focuses on bibliographic development and analysis of the literature on a topic otherwise not covered in depth in the curriculum. Major paper required. May be repeated for credit.
Prerequisites: None.
Restrictions: Sophomore standing and consent required.
Usually offered: Annually, fall and spring semester.
Semester credits: 1-4.

RELS 330 Jesus: History, Myth, and Mystery
Faculty: Kugler.
Content: Survey of the history of cultural appropriations of Jesus through the centuries, ending with the contemporary search for the historical Jesus and its pop culture congenerators. A case study in the appropriation of a classical religious figure. Gospel records; evidence of other ancient sources, including noncanonical gospels; early Christian writings; Western cultural appropriations of Jesus; and Jesus in modern film and literature.
Prerequisites: None.
Restrictions: Sophomore standing required.
Usually offered: Alternate Years.
Semester credits: 4.

RELS 333 Apocalyptic Imagination
Faculty: Kugler.
Content: For centuries Jews and Christians have sought to make sense of human existence through apocalyptic speculation, stimulating along the way a parallel secular apocalyptic imagination. Exploration of the interplay between religious and secular apocalyptic and the sociohistorical and cultural realities it responded to and engendered. A focus on early Jewish and Christian apocalyptic from the 6th century B.C.E. to the 3rd century C.E. and selected instances of apocalyptic through the 21st century C.E. Resources include archaeological evidence, literature, art, music, and film.
Prerequisites: One 200-level Religious Studies course.
Restrictions: Sophomore standing required.
Usually offered: Alternate Years.
Semester credits: 4.

RELS 334 Lost Books of Early Judaism
Faculty: Kugler.
Content: Jews of the Persian and Greco-Roman periods produced many literary works written in Greek. Later, rabbinic Judaism prohibited these books not only because of the language in which they were written, but also because they were so heavily influenced by the literature, thought, and social world of Classical Greek and Hellenistic culture. Analyzing these Jewish texts and corollary Classical literature provides a window on lost forms of Judaism at its infancy and on the relationship between religious traditions and cultural contexts.
Prerequisites: None.
Restrictions: Sophomore standing required.
Usually offered: Alternate Years.
Semester credits: 4.

RELS 340 Women in American Religious History
Faculty: Religious Studies Faculty.
Content: Women’s experience of religion in America from the colonial era to the present. The relationship between gender and religious beliefs and practices. Religion as means of oppression and liberation of women. Relations of lay women and male clergy. Women religious leaders. Diverse movements and cultures including Native American, colonial society, immigrant communities, and radical religionists from Anne Hutchinson to Mary Daly.
Prerequisites: RELS 253 or RELS 254 recommended.
Restrictions: Sophomore standing required.
Usually offered: Alternate Years, spring semester.
Semester credits: 4.
RELS 341 Religions of the Northwest
Faculty: Morrill.
Content: Exploration of the religious history of the Pacific Northwest, with a focus on Oregon and Washington. Examination of the religious traditions of regional Native American tribes, early Protestant missions, and the growth of Catholicism and Mormonism in the region, as well as recent immigrant religions (such as Vietnamese Buddhism), nondenominational Christian groups, and alternative forms of spirituality. Using theoretical models from religious studies to consider why the Northwest does not carry the imprint of a dominant religious tradition or traditions, as most other regions of the country do. Prerequisites: RELS 253, RELS 254, or consent of instructor.
Restrictions: Sophomore standing required.
Usually offered: Alternate Years, spring semester. Semester credits: 4.

RELS 354 The Invention of Buddhist Literature
Faculty: Cole.
Content: Survey of the first writings in Buddhism (circa first century C.E.). Exploration of the nature of narrative, the role of art in the invention of new forms of tradition, and the way media developments shifted the concerns of the Buddhist tradition. Emphasis on reviewing relevant theories of narrative from the 20th century. Prerequisites: RELS 243 or consent of instructor.
Restrictions: Sophomore standing required.

RELS 355 Sufism: Islamic Mysticism
Content: The historical roots and branches of Sufi Islam, including the search for the "inner meaning" of the Qur’an, complex metaphysical formulations, ascetic assertions, meditation practices, devotional ruminations on love, and Sufi poetry and music. Discussion of the important role of Sufism in the spread of Islam. Muslim critiques of Sufism and Sufi responses. Prerequisites: RELS 273 or consent of instructor.
Restrictions: Sophomore standing required.

RELS 356 Women in Buddhism
Faculty: Starling.
Content: This course examines women and gender in Buddhist mythology, doctrine, practice, and institutions. The course spans the entire length of the Buddhist tradition (i.e., 500 BCE to the present) and addresses examples from the Indian, Southeast Asian, Tibetan, and Japanese Buddhist contexts. Emphasis will be on the tension between Buddhism’s theoretical discourse on women and gender and the actual roles and experiences of women in the Buddhist tradition. Students will learn various theoretical approaches to gender and religion while exploring the problems with assuming Western constructions of gender and feminism in non-Western religious contexts. Topics include the founding myth of the Buddhist order of nuns and the writings of early nuns, Buddhist discourse on female impurity and the exclusion of women from sacred mountains, female tantric adepts and depictions of the feminine in Tibetan Buddhism, the movement to revive full ordination for nuns in Southeast Asia, and the Buddhist feminist movement in contemporary Japan. Prerequisites: Any 200-level Religious Studies course.
Restrictions: Sophomore standing required.
Usually offered: Alternate Years, fall semester. Semester credits: 4.

RELS 373 Reformations of the 16th Century
Content: A historical perspective on the various religious movements, collectively known as the Protestant Reformation, that marked Europe’s transition from the medieval to the early modern period (circa 1400 to 1600). Review of medieval religious patterns. The status of Catholic institutions and ideas in crises of the late medieval period, the theologies of Luther and Calvin, radical movements, the political background of the Reformation, and Catholic responses to Protestantism. Readings and discussions concentrate on recent social historiography of the Reformation. Popular appeal of Protestant religiosity, social implications of Calvinism, roles of women in the Reformation, family patterns and the Reformation, class structure and competing religious cultures, Catholicism and rural society. Prerequisites: RELS 251 or consent of instructor.
Restrictions: Sophomore standing required.

RELS 376 Religious Fundamentalism
Content: The perceptions and realities of religious resurgence in a supposedly secularizing world. Focus on the historical, theological, social, and political aspects of Christian and Islamic fundamentalism. Themes include secularization theories and their critics, changing understandings of religion and modernity, connections among religion, politics, violence, sexuality/gender, and identity. Prerequisites: RELS 254 or RELS 274, or consent of instructor.
Restrictions: Sophomore standing required.
RELS 450 Seminar: Social and Religious World of Early Judaism and Christianity
Faculty: Kugler.
Content: Recent research into the relationship between the social setting of early Judaism and Christianity and the texts both religions produced. Special attention to the sociohistorical aspects of selected regional expressions of Judaism and Christianity (e.g., Asia Minor, Palestine, Egypt). Readings from the Dead Sea Scrolls, Jewish pseudepigrapha, the New Testament, other early Christian literature, and media interpretations of Judaism and Christianity to the present. Emphasis on original student research. With instructor consent, may be taken twice for credit.
Prerequisites: RELS 224 or RELS 225 or consent.
Restrictions: Sophomore standing required.
Usually offered: Alternate Years, fall and spring semester.
Semester credits: 4.

RELS 451 Seminar in American Religion
Faculty: Morrill.
Content: Major trends in American religion from the Puritans to the feminist and liberation theologies of the 20th century. Intensive reading of works by major American figures and scholars. With instructor consent, may be taken twice for credit.
Prerequisites: RELS 253 or RELS 254, or consent of instructor.
Restrictions: Sophomore standing required.
Usually offered: Alternate Years, spring semester.
Semester credits: 4.

RELS 452 Seminar in Asian Religions
Faculty: Religious Studies Faculty.
Content: Advanced interdisciplinary seminar on the matrix of religion, politics, and literature with a focus on Asian theories of pleasure, power, and sanctity. Comparative analysis of notions of self-identity, the body, and perfection through investigation of myth and ritual. With instructor consent, may be taken twice for credit.
Prerequisites: RELS 242 or consent of instructor.
Restrictions: Sophomore standing required.
Usually offered: Alternate Years, fall and spring semester.
Semester credits: 4.

RELS 453 Seminar in Islamic Studies: Islamic Law
Faculty: Powers.
Content: The religio-legal traditions of Islam, the efforts to develop a comprehensive set of behavior guides derived from the Qur’an, the exemplary behavior of the Prophet, and other sources. Topics include legal history; efforts at modernization and reform; the formation of the major schools of law; legal theory and methods for deriving rules from sacred texts; the rules of ritual, civil, and criminal law; political theory; adjudication and court procedure; Islamic law and the colonial encounter; legal expressions of gender roles; and historical case studies.
Prerequisites: RELS 273 or consent of instructor.
Restrictions: Sophomore standing required.
Usually offered: Alternate Years, fall semester.
Semester credits: 4.

RELS 455 Themes in History of Religions
Content: Study of a selected theme in the history of religions (e.g., interiority; construction of the self; notions of the sacred; scripture; development of tradition) from diverse theoretical and methodological perspectives.
Prerequisites: Completion of a religious studies course at the 200 level or higher.
Restrictions: Sophomore standing required.
Usually offered: Alternate Years.
Semester credits: 4.

RELS 490 Senior Thesis
Faculty: Cole, Kugler, Morrill, Powers.
Content: Advanced readings and major works in religion. In consultation with faculty, selection of a thesis topic and further reading in the discipline and research in the topic area. Substantial written document demonstrating mastery of theory and methodology in the study of religion and the ability to integrate these into the thesis topic.
Prerequisites: None.
Restrictions: Senior standing or consent of instructor required.
Usually offered: Annually.
Semester credits: 4.

RELS 499 Independent Study
Faculty: Kugler, Morrill, Powers.
Content: Individual study directed by selected faculty. Determined in consultation with faculty, study focuses on primary research, methodological concerns, and bibliography on a topic of mutual interest to the student and faculty director. Major paper required. May be repeated for credit.
Prerequisites: None.
Restrictions: Sophomore standing and consent required.
Usually offered: Annually, fall and spring semester.
Semester credits: 1-4.