

# Religious Studies

## *Humanities*

### Requirements

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 trans-disciplinary 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 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. They are so noted below. 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 RLST 101, 102, or 103; RLST 390 (Approaches to the Study of Religion); RLST 490 (Senior Seminar); and 3.5 other units. These units must include foundation courses (200 level) in traditions or areas representing at least four of the five fields of study (see lists below). In one of the traditions/areas, at least one more advanced course must also be taken. (Note: there are seven traditions/areas grouped in five fields of study. The advanced course must be in the same tradition or area, not just the same field.)

It is highly recommended that majors take all four of their required foundation courses, if possible, before their senior year. Students who are considering spending any portion of the junior year abroad should take RLST 390 (Approaches) in the sophomore year; otherwise the junior year is recommended.

#### **A. Fields of Study (covering seven traditions/areas)**

1. Judaism
2. Christianity
3. Religions of the Americas
4. Islam, South Asian religions
5. Buddhism, East Asian religions

#### **B. Foundation Courses (by tradition/area)**

Judaism:

RLST 210 The Judaic Tradition

RLST 211 Modern Judaism

RLST 212 The Jews in Literature

Christianity:

RLST 220 Faith of Christians

RLST 225 New Testament

Americas:

RLST 230 Religion and Society in America (U.S.)

RLST 234 African Spirituality in the Americas

RLST 332 African American Religions

Islam:

RLST 240 Classical Islam

South Asian:

RLST 250 South Asian Religions

Buddhism:

RLST 260 Buddhist Thought and Practice

East Asian:

RLST 270 Chinese Religions

RLST 275 Japanese Religions

### **Senior Exercise**

The Senior Exercise in religious studies consists of (1) the Senior Seminar, RLST 490; (2) a comprehensive examination consisting of short-answer, objective questions on the seven traditions/areas; (3) a ten- to twelve-page essay on an assigned topic or, if approved by the department faculty, a longer comparative research paper (sixteen to twenty pages); and (4) satisfactory participation in a Senior Conference (a presentation and discussion of senior papers before students and RLST faculty).

### **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 1 to 1.5 units 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 3 units are required for the minor in religious studies. The following are the minimum requirements:

- RLST 101, 102, or 103 (.5 unit)
- A foundation course and at least one further course in one of the seven areas listed above (1 unit)
- A second foundation course in another religious tradition (.5 unit)
- Two additional courses (1 unit)
- At least one course must be a seminar.

## Courses

### **RLST 101 ENCOUNTERING RELIGION IN ITS GLOBAL CONTEXT: AN INTRODUCTION**

*Credit: 0.5*

The format of this course is lecture and discussion. The usual enrollment in each section is twenty to twenty-five students. The 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). The Department of Religious Studies emphasizes writing, and several essays are assigned in this course. The course is open to all students. Offered fall and spring.

Instructor: Staff

### **RLST 102 FIRST-YEAR SEMINAR: ENCOUNTERING RELIGION**

*Credit: 0.5*

This course covers the same material as RLST 101 but is open only to first-year students and will be run in a seminar format.

### **RLST 103 FIRST-YEAR SEMINAR: ENCOUNTERING RELIGION: WOMEN AND RELIGION**

*Credit: 0.5*

This course presents an introduction to the study of religion, focusing particularly on women. A variety of religious traditions will be explored as we look into myths, rituals, and practices particular to women. Traditions to be explored may include Buddhism, Hinduism, Judaism, Christianity, and some Native American religions. Students will have a hand in shaping the syllabus in the last third of the semester, with the expectation that individual interests can be accommodated. Enrollment limited to first-year students.

## **RLST 141 TRIALS, DEBATES, AND CONTROVERSIES**

*Credit: 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 are divided 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.

## **RLST 210 THE JUDAIC TRADITION**

*Credit: 0.5*

For over two millennia Judaism has expressed itself through continual interpretation and reinterpretation of its fundamental teachings. With a particular focus on the mystical strand in Judaism, this course will address the central beliefs and practices of Judaism (e.g., monotheism, covenant, commandments, the Sabbath, and holy days) through study of its rich textual and ritual traditions. Developments in Jewish life and thought will be traced through a variety of literature: the Bible (Torah, prophets, Psalms and the Five Scrolls); rabbinic texts (Mishnah, Talmud, and midrash); poetry (Jehuda ha Levi's "Songs of Zion"); medieval philosophy (Maimonides' *Guide for the Perplexed*); and the mystical strand embodied in the *Zohar*. Students will gain an appreciation for the origins of Jewish teachings that remain vital in the tradition today.

Instructor: Dean-Otting

## **RLST 211 MODERN JUDAISM**

*Credit: 0.5*

This course will survey the life and thought of Jews from the sixteenth century through the modern era. Using a large selection of primary sources (sacred texts, diaries, philosophy, contemporary sources, films, and art), the course will address how fundamental Jewish ideas and practices have both remained the same and changed in response to modernity. Topics covered will include, but not be limited to, worship and ritual, the Jewish Enlightenment, Hasidism, the branches of Judaism, love of Zion and the foundation of the state of Israel, feminism, and ceremonial art.

Instructor: Dean-Otting

## **RLST 212 THE JEWS IN LITERATURE**

*Credit: 0.5*

The purpose of this course is to study the culture, history and religious practices of the Jewish people through literature. Although Jews are known as “the people of the book” and have had a rich literary history since ancient times, the emergence of Jews as characters in non-religious literature is a comparatively modern phenomenon. Nevertheless, there are many writers, Jewish and non-Jewish, who have created narratives that revolve around Jews and Judaism. We will begin by studying a few works by non-Jewish authors. We will then quickly turn to the work of Jewish writers (originally written in Yiddish, Hebrew, Russian or English) in order to carefully track themes of Jewish life in a variety of literatures from a number of Jewish cultures (European, American, Israeli and South African). Prior knowledge of Jews and Judaism is not required.

## **RLST 220 FAITH OF CHRISTIANS**

*Credit: 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 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.

Instructor: Suydam

## **RLST 225 NEW TESTAMENT**

*Credit: 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 will also examine the relation between Christianity and the Roman Empire, the relation between Christianity and Judaism, the relation between Christianity and Gnosticism, and the placement of women within the New Testament. Methodologies currently practiced in biblical exegesis, including form criticism, redaction criticism, literary-criticism, and socio-historical criticism, are also introduced. Students are required to 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.

## **RLST 230 RELIGION AND SOCIETY IN AMERICA (U.S.)**

*Credit: 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. Section one examines the attempt of European immigrants to establish church-state compacts in New England and Virginia, while the middle colonies adopted a more pluralistic approach. Section two surveys 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." Section three looks 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. Section four examines 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. Offered fall semester every other year.

Instructor: Edmonds

## **RLST 232 AFRO-CARIBBEAN SPIRITUALITY**

*Credit: 0.5*

This course explores the contours of the religious expressions that people of African descent have forged in the Caribbean. It will examine the context of domination and resistance in which African spirituality was forged, give a brief overview of African influence on religious expressions in the Americas, and explore the religious traditions of Vodou, Santeria, and Rastafari, paying close attention to their social history, their understanding of the universe, their social structure, and their rituals and ceremonies. Offered fall semester every year.

Instructor: Edmonds

## **RLST 235 AFRICAN SPIRITUALITY IN THE AMERICAS**

*Credit: 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-Christians 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. The aim of this course is to provide 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.

Instructor: Edmonds

## **RLST 240 CLASSICAL ISLAM**

*Credit: 0.5*

Islam is the religion of more than a billion people and the dominant cultural element in a geographical region that stretches from Morocco to Indonesia. This course examines the development of Islam and Islamic institutions, from the time of the Prophet Muhammad until the death of Al-Ghazali in 1111 CE. Special attention will be given to the rise of Sunni, Shi'i, and Sufi piety as distinctive responses to the Qur'anic revelation.

Instructor: Schubel

## **RLST 242 AFRO-AMERICAN RELIGIONS**

*Credit: 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 Americans' 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 the rise of independent African American churches in both the North and the South; the role of African American churches during the Reconstruction and Jim Crow eras; the emergence of diverse African American religious traditions and movements in the first half of the twentieth 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 audio-visual materials in exploring the development of and issues in African American religious experiences. Offered fall semester every other year.

## **RLST 250 SOUTH ASIAN RELIGIONS**

*Credit: 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.

Instructor: Schubel



## **RLST 260 BUDDHIST THOUGHT AND PRACTICE**

*Credit: 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 will survey the history, doctrines, and practices of Buddhism in South Asia, Southeast Asia, Tibet, and East Asia. Readings will be in both primary texts and secondary sources, and will be supplemented by films. The format will be a combination of lecture and discussion. No prerequisite. Offered every third year.

Instructor: Adler

## **RLST 270 CHINESE RELIGIONS**

*Credit: 0.5*

This course is a survey of the major historical and contemporary currents of religious thought and practice in Chinese culture. Our aim will be to gain a richer understanding of some characteristic Chinese ways of experiencing the self, society, and the world. We will examine the three traditional "teachings" (Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism), as well as "popular religion," and the contributions of all four to Chinese culture. Specific themes will include ancestor worship, sacrifice and divination, religious ethics, meditation, and longevity techniques. In each section we will attempt to identify those aspects of Chinese religion which are inextricable from traditional Chinese culture and those which are capable of crossing cultural boundaries. Classes are a mixture of lecture and discussion. Readings will focus on primary religious texts, supplemented by films. No prerequisite. Offered every fall semester.

Instructor: Adler

## **RLST 275 JAPANESE RELIGIONS**

*Credit: 0.5*

This course will be a historical and contemporary survey of religious life in Japan, focusing on the Shinto, Buddhist, and Confucian traditions. We will pay special attention to the ways in which religious ideas, values, and practices are integrated into the common forms of Japanese culture today. Classes will be a mixture of lecture and discussion, supplemented by films. No prerequisite. Offered every third year.

Instructor: Adler

## **RLST 310 HEBREW SCRIPTURES/OLD TESTAMENT**

*Credit: 0.5*

This course will serve as an introduction to the Hebrew Scriptures (Old Testament), as they reflect the myths, history, and institutions of ancient Israel. Topics to be explored will include biblical narratives and poetry, law codes, prayers and ritual, the prophetic critique of religion and society, and wisdom literature.

Students will be given an opportunity to read a selection of short fiction and poetry that have been inspired by biblical literature.

Instructor: Dean-Otting

### **RLST 311 YEARNING FOR ZION: HOPES AND REALITIES**

*Credit: 0.5*

This seminar 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 nineteenth and early twentieth 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. Prerequisite: permission of instructor.

Instructor: Dean-Otting

### **RLST 320 MEDIEVAL CHRISTIANITY**

*Credit: 0.5*

We will examine major works by central figures involved in the development of the medieval world-view: theological disputes, mysticism, inter-religious 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 to be read include Augustine, Benedict, Abelard, Francis of Assisi, Bonaventure, Aquinas, Julian of Norwich, and Dante.

Instructor: Rhodes

### **RLST 328 WOMEN IN CHRISTIANITY**

*Credit: 0.5*

This course explores the significance of Christianity for women in that tradition. Why wasn't Mary considered one of the disciples? How did a system of church government evolve that excluded women? How have women responded to that system? We will examine founders of church-reform movements such as Claire of Assisi, as well as founders of new Christian churches (e.g., Ellen White, founder of Seventh-Day Adventism, and Mary Baker Eddy, founder of Christian Science). The course will also explore contemporary Christian issues involving women, such as ordination, abortion, and marriage and divorce laws. One of the goals of the course is to explore the importance and consequence of gender in the

Christian experience. Is Christianity different for men and women? A respect for the variety within Christianity and the choices made by different women within it are also important parts of this course.

Instructor: Suydam

### **RLST 329 CHRISTIAN MYSTICISM**

*Credit: 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 nineteenth and twentieth 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 are also pertinent, as women's access to the philosophical traditions was more limited than men's. We will also explore the role of mystical traditions in contemporary "mainstream" Christianity. What does mysticism look like today?

Instructor: Suydam

### **RLST 331 THE REFORMATION AND LITERATURE: DOGMA AND DISSENT**

*Credit: 0.5*

The Reformation deeply influenced the literary development of England and transformed the religious, intellectual, and cultural worlds of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The long process of Reformation, shaped by late-medieval piety, the Renaissance, Continental activists, and popular religion, illustrates both religious continuities and discontinuities in the works of poets and prelates, prayer books and propaganda, sermons and exorcisms, bibles and broadsheets. This interdisciplinary course will focus on a range of English literature, from the Humanists under early Tudor monarchs to the flowering of Renaissance writers in the Elizabethan and Stuart eras, in the context of religious history, poetry, drama, prose, and iconography. Writers and reformers, such as More, Erasmus, Cranmer, Shakespeare, Marlowe, Southwell, Herbert, and Donne, will be examined. This course is also listed as ENGL 331.

Instructor: Davidson, Rhodes

### **RLST 332 AFRICAN-AMERICAN RELIGIONS**

*Credit: 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 the reconstruction and Jim Crow; the emergence of diverse African-American religious traditions and movements in the first half of the Twentieth 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 African 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 audio-visual materials in exploring the development of and the issues in African American religious experiences. Offered fall semester every other year.

Instructor: Edmonds

### **RLST 342 RELIGION AND POPULAR MUSIC IN THE AFRICAN DIASPORA**

*Credit: 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. Offered spring semester every other year.

Instructor: Edmonds

### **RLST 360 ZEN BUDDHISM**

*Credit: 0.5*

This course will cover the history, doctrines, 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. The class format will be a combination of lecture and discussion. Readings will be in both primary texts and secondary studies and will be supplemented by films. No prerequisite. Offered every third year.

Instructor: Adler

## **RLST 380 SOCIAL JUSTICE: THE ANCIENT AND MODERN TRADITIONS**

*Credit: 0.5*

This mid-level course will examine the development of theories of ethics and social justice from the ancient Hebrew tradition of Torah and the prophets, New Testament writers Luke and Matthew, and medieval natural law, to modern discussions about social, political, and economic justice. We will explore how critical social theory has been applied within the political and economic context of modern industrial societies and how biblical and later religious teachings have been used as the basis for social ethics. Questions of justice, freedom, development, individualism, and alienation will be major themes in this study of capitalism, Christianity, and Marxism. Special emphasis will be on contemporary debates about the ethics of democratic capitalism from within conservative theology and philosophy and radical liberation theology. Readings will be from the Bible, Papal encyclicals, the American Catholic bishops' letter on economics and social justice, Friedman, Wallis, Farmer, Novak, Baum, Miranda, Fromm, Pirsig, Schumacher, and N. Wolf. Prerequisite: permission of instructor. This course is also listed as SOCY 243.

Instructor: Staff

## **RLST 381 MEANINGS OF DEATH**

*Credit: 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. Prerequisite: sophomore standing.

Instructor: Rhodes

## **RLST 382 PROPHECY**

*Credit: 0.5*

Prophets were the messengers of justice and social responsibility in antiquity. This course poses the question: Are there contemporary prophets? We will first focus on the origins of prophecy in the Ancient Near East, and then will explore a number of contemporary writers. Max Weber, Victor Turner, Abraham Joshua Heschel, Cornel West, and Martin Buber will provide theoretical perspectives. We will examine the role of biblical prophets (Amos, Isaiah, Micah, and others) and the prophetic roles of Jesus and Muhammad. In the last two-thirds of the semester we will study a selection of modern voices on current social issues. Possibilities include but are not limited to: Martin Luther King Jr., Malcolm X, bell hooks, Jonathan Kozol, Wendell Berry, Arundhati Roy, Bob Marley, June Jordan, and Aharon Shabtai. Prerequisite: sophomore standing.

Instructor: Dean-Otting

### **RLST 390 APPROACHES TO THE STUDY OF RELIGION**

*Credit: 0.5*

This is a survey intended to acquaint 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, Levi-Strauss, Douglas, Geertz, and Turner. This course is required for religious studies majors. Offered every fall.

Instructor: Staff

### **RLST 398 JUNIOR HONORS**

*Credit: 0.5*

### **RLST 421 MODERN CATHOLICISM**

*Credit: 0.5*

This course examines the reform and renewal of Catholicism confronting modernity. We will study major trends, using documents from official sources and the writings of key figures, from Cardinal Newman to Benedict XVI and Pope Francis. The changing role of the papacy will be discussed in terms of historical statements, recent ecumenical exchanges with other Christians and non-Christian groups, and developing alternate models of the church. Catholic thought on peace and social justice, sexual ethics, and trends in spirituality will be traced using theological, artistic, and literary sources. No prerequisite.

Instructor: Rhodes

### **RLST 440 SEMINAR ON SUFISM**

*Credit: 0.5*

This seminar 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. Prerequisite: RLST 240 or permission of instructor.

Instructor: Schubel

## **RLST 443 VOICES OF CONTEMPORARY ISLAM**

*Credit: 0.5*

This seminar 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 Wahabism 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 Fadl, Amina Wadud, and Osama bin Laden. Prerequisite: RLST 240 or permission of instructor.

Instructor: Schubel

## **RLST 447 ISLAM IN NORTH AMERICA**

*Credit: 0.5*

This course will be an examination of Islam in contemporary North America and Canada. It will explore such topics as the diversity of the Muslims 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. Prerequisite: RLST 240 or permission of instructor.

Instructor: Schubel

## **RLST 471 CONFUCIAN THOUGHT AND PRACTICE**

*Credit: 0.5*

This seminar will explore the philosophical and cultural history of the Confucian tradition, primarily in China, from its inception to the present day. Readings will 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 twentieth 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 270 or 472 or HIST 161 or 263 or PHIL 212 or permission of instructor. Offered every other spring semester.

Instructor: Adler

## **RLST 472 TAOISM**

*Credit: 0.5*

This seminar will examine 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

Daoism"), we will 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 will then examine the origins, beliefs, and practices of the Daoist religion with its hereditary and monastic priesthoods, 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. Prerequisite: any one of the following: RLST 270 (Chinese Religions; either past or concurrent enrollment), RLST 471 (Confucian Traditions), HIST 161 (East Asia to 1850), HIST 263 (Imperial China), or permission of instructor.

### **RLST 480 RELIGIOUS COMMUNITIES**

*Credit: 0.5*

This course will examine traditional and innovative forms of monastic life and spirituality, using as a case study contemporary Christianity in dialogue with global monastic traditions, in Buddhism and Hinduism. Starting with a brief historical overview, we will read the works of Thomas Merton, Henri Nouwen, Benedicta Ward, and Kathleen Norris. We will also use documentary videos and fictional accounts of the ascetic life, and track recent features of inter-faith monastic contacts. Prerequisite: sophomore standing.

Instructor: Rhodes

### **RLST 481 RELIGION AND NATURE**

*Credit: 0.5*

This seminar 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, Daoism, 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 other year.

Instructor: Adler

### **RLST 490 SENIOR SEMINAR**

*Credit: 0.5*

This course is designed as a capstone experience in religious studies for majors in the department. The theme of the seminar will vary according to the instructor. Past themes have included religious



autobiography, religion and cinema and new religious movements. The course is required for, but not limited to, senior religious studies majors. Religious studies minors are encouraged to enroll, provided there is space. Non-majors should consult the instructor for permission to register for the course.

Instructor: Staff

### **RLST 493 INDIVIDUAL STUDY**

*Credit: 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. Normally, 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.

To enroll, a student must seek permission of the instructor and department chair, ideally during the semester before the individual study is to take place. 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 .5 or .25 unit, at the discretion of the instructor. Prerequisite: GPA of at least 3.0. Exceptions (e.g., for languages not regularly taught at Kenyon) are granted at the discretion of the instructor, with the approval of the department chair.

### **RLST 497Y SENIOR HONORS**

*Credit: 0.5*

Prerequisite: permission of department.

### **RLST 498Y SENIOR HONORS**

*Credit: 0.5*

Prerequisite: permission of department.