

Religious Studies

HUMANITIES DIVISION

Faculty

Joseph A. Adler
Associate Professor

Miriam Dean-Otting
Chair, Professor

Judith C. Fagan
Assistant Professor

Nurten Kilic-Schubel
Visiting Assistant Professor (on leave)

Eugen Kullmann
Professor Emeritus

Royal W. Rhodes
Donald L. Rogan Professor

Donald L. Rogan
Professor Emeritus

Vernon J. Schubel
Professor (on leave)

Mary Suydam
Visiting Assistant Professor

The Department of Religious Studies approaches religion as a global and pluralistic phenomenon. We understand the study of religion as a crucial element in the larger study of culture and history. Our goals include helping students (1) to recognize and examine the important role of religion in history and the contemporary world; (2) to explore the wide variety of religious thought and practice, past and present; (3) to develop methods for the academic study of particular religions and religion in comparative perspective; and (4) to develop the necessary skills to contribute to the ongoing discussion of the nature of religion.

Since the phenomena that we collectively call “religious” 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, philosophical, and psychological questions. We also encourage religious studies majors to take relevant courses in other departments, and our faculty members frequently team-teach with members of other departments.

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 courses require no commitment to a particular faith. 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.

Our introductory courses (RELN 101, 102, and 103) are designed especially for students new to the study of religion, although they are not prerequisites to other courses. RELN 101 is a regular class; RELN 102 covers the same material in the format of a seminar limited to first-year students; RELN 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. The introductory and foundation courses are indicated below by the ♦ symbol. 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.

Requirements for the Major

Students majoring in religious studies are required to take RELN 101, 102, or 103; RELN 390 (Approaches to the Study of Religion); RELN 490 (Senior Seminar), and 3 1/2 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 RELN 390 (Approaches) in the sophomore year; otherwise the junior year is recommended.

Unless specified otherwise in the course description, any student may take any course; the numbering system does not correspond to levels of difficulty.

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:

RELN 210 The Judaic Tradition
RELN 211 Modern Judaism

Christianity:

RELN 220 Faith of Christians
RELN 225 The New Testament

Americas:

RELN 230 Religion in America

Islam:

RELN 240 Classical Islam

South Asian:

RELN 250 South Asian Religions

Buddhism:

RELN 260 Buddhist Thought and Practice

East Asian:

RELN 270 Chinese Religions
RELN 275 Japanese Religions

The Senior Exercise in religious studies consists of (1) the Senior Seminar, RELN 490; (2) a comprehensive examination consisting of short-answer, objective questions on the seven traditions areas; (3) a fifteen- to twenty-page comparative essay on an assigned topic; OR, if approved by the department faculty, a longer comparative research paper (twenty to twenty-five pages); and (4) satisfactory participation in a Senior Symposium (a discussion and critique, with a small group of students and faculty, of the comparative papers).

Students with an overall grade point average of 3.25 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 1/2 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 is required for the minor in religious studies. The following are the minimum requirements:

- RELN 101, 102, or 103 (1/2 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 (1/2 unit)
- Two additional courses (1 unit)
- At least one course must be a seminar.

Year Course

Senior Honors

RELN 497-498 (1 unit)
Staff

Prerequisite: permission of department.

First-Semester Courses

Introduction to the Study of Religion

◆ RELN 101 (1/2 unit)
Staff

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 Judaic Tradition

◆ RELN 210 (1/2 unit)
Dean-Otting

This course will explore the origins of Judaism and the development of fundamental Jewish ideas and practices from the Babylonian exile to the Middle Ages. Monotheism, *mitzvot* (commandments), Torah, covenant, holy days, and rituals are some of the topics that will be covered. We will study the Hellenistic sects of Judaism (including early Christianity and the community of the Dead Sea Scrolls), as well as the works of the philosopher Philo and the historian Josephus, both of whom were deeply influenced by Greek ideas. Non-biblical literature found in the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha will offer insights into the extraordinary vitality of ancient Judaism. Rabbinic Judaism will be presented through primary texts (Mishnah and Talmud). We will examine some aspects of the mystical literature of medieval Judaism. Finally we will study the medieval philosophers, including Saadia Gaon, Jehuda ha-Levi and Maimonides, both through philosophical works and poetry.

Faith of Christians

◆ RELN 220 (1/2 unit)
Rhodes

This course presents an inquiry into the main elements of the traditional beliefs held in common by Christians and an examination of how those beliefs function in the modern world. Students will explore the diversity of views expressed by Christians on central issues such as God, Christ, the Spirit, the church, creation, history, and the end-time.

The New Testament

◆ RELN 225 (1/2 unit)
Suydam

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, competing forms

of Christianity within the ancient world (including differing views of Jesus within canonical and noncanonical writings), 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. Various methodologies currently practiced in biblical exegesis, including form criticism, redaction criticism, literary criticism, and socio-historical criticism, are also introduced; and students are required to read these writings critically, analyzing structure, themes, and the narrative voices of the texts to discover the distinctive literary and religious differences among the various writings. No previous familiarity with the New Testament is required.

Religion in American Culture

◆ RELN 230 (1/2 unit)
Fagan

This course serves as an introduction to recurring themes and questions about the place of religion in American culture. The course is structured both historically and thematically, investigating at each stage the intersection of religion with social, political, economic, gendered, racial, and ethnic identities. Students will be asked to become informed about the theoretical aspects of the issues we discuss. In the context of American culture, for example, what is "religion?" Who practices religion? Whose religions matter most? Is there a difference between religion and "spirituality?" What is the role of religion in public life? Students will also be introduced to a rich variety of religious ideas and practices present in American culture, including Native American, African American, Millenarian, Mormon, and Pentecostal groups, along with Vodou, Santería, and other new forms of religious practices. Critical analysis of both primary and secondary texts (which include autobiography, fiction, and case studies) is required. Students will also be engaged in local fieldwork.

This course can serve as a disciplinary course towards the American Studies Concentration.

Chinese Religions

◆ RELN 270 (1/2 unit)
Adler

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, Taoism, 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 and slides.

Ethics and Social Justice: The Ancient and Modern Traditions

RELN 380 (1/2 unit)
*George E. McCarthy, NEH
Distinguished Teaching Professor of
Sociology; Rhodes*

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 the Greek drama of Aeschylus and political philosophy of Aristotle, to modern discussions about social, political, and economic justice. We will explore how modern social theories have employed ancient Hebrew and Greek teachings as the bases for social ethics. Questions of justice, freedom, economic development, individualism, and alienation will be major themes in this study of liberalism, Christianity, and Marxism. Special emphasis will be on contemporary

debates about the ethics of democratic capitalism, including conservative theology and philosophy and radical liberation theology. Readings will be from the Bible, Aeschylus, Aristotle, Pope John Paul II, M. Friedman, E. Fromm, R. Pirsig, E.F. Schumacher, and N. Wolf. Prerequisite: introductory sociology or religious studies courses or permission of the instructor. This course is cross-listed as SOCY 243.

Approaches to the Study of Religion

RELN 390 (1/2 unit)
Fagan

This course introduces students to the pivotal figures and major theories that have shaped the development of religious studies as a Western academic, nonconfessional field of inquiry. We will place figures such as E. B. Tylor, Karl Marx, Emile Durkheim, Sigmund Freud, Mircea Eliade and others within their own historical contexts as we consider the questions which guided their interest in the study of religion. We will attempt to develop a *critical appreciation* for the intellectual tradition inherited by scholars entering this field. In other words, we want to recognize *both* the strengths and weaknesses of the methods and models available for us to “think religion” today.

Religion and Nature

RELN 481 (1/2 unit)
Adler

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, 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: RELN 101 or a foundation course in religious studies (200-level).

Senior Seminar

RELN 490 (1/2 unit)
Dean-Otting

This year’s topic will offer opportunities to examine the phenomenon of sainthood in a variety of religious traditions. The ideal of the holy person will be studied in ancient and modern texts. The course will focus on various theories regarding the nature of holy persons and will apply the theories to a number of different examples. From the miracle workers among Christian saints in antiquity, to contemplative Buddhist ascetics, to the Hasidic storytelling *zaddikim*, what can be discovered about holy persons? Our last text, a novel, will confront us with the fine line between holiness and possession by demons. The course is required for, but not limited to, senior religious studies majors. Non-majors should consult the instructor for permission to enroll in the course.

Individual Study

RELN 493 (1/2 unit)
Staff

Prerequisites: Permission of instructor and department chair.

Second-Semester Courses

Introduction to the Study of Religion

◆ RELN 101 (1/2 unit)
Staff

See first-semester course description.

First Year Seminar: Introduction to the Study of Religion: Women and Religion

◆ RELN 103 (1/2 unit)
Dean-Otting

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 twelve first-year students.

The Holocaust: An Interdisciplinary Inquiry

INDS 231 (1/2 unit)
Mikhail Lyubansky, assistant professor of psychology; Suydam

This course presents an interdisciplinary inquiry into the destruction of European Jewry during the Second World War. How was it that in the twentieth century, in the midst of civilized Europe, a policy of genocide was formulated and systematically implemented? We will examine the Holocaust within the contexts of modern European history, Nazi ideology and practice, the Jewish experience in Europe, the history of anti-Semitism, and the psychology of human behavior. Data will be drawn from film, literature, art, memoirs, theology, and historical investigations. An ongoing concern of the course will be the significance of the Holocaust in contemporary political discourse and in our own thinking as individuals. The course may be counted as credit toward the major by students of history or religious studies. Prerequisite: sophomore standing or higher. Enrollment limited.

Japanese Religions

RELN 275 (1/2 unit)
Adler

This course is 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 are a mixture of lecture and discussion.

The Jews in Literature

RELN 312 (1/2 unit)
Dean-Otting

This seminar will survey the theme of Jews in literature in outstanding works from the fourteenth through the twentieth century in a variety of genres (poetry, drama, folktales, short stories, and novels). Both Jewish and

non-Jewish authors have focused on Jews in their narratives. Authors considered will include Chaucer, Shakespeare, George Eliot, I.L. Peretz, Scholem Aleichem, Anzia Yezierska, Tillie Olsen, Yehuda Amichai, Aaron Appelfeld, Cynthia Ozick, and other contemporary writers. Enrollment limited.

The Reformation and Literature: Dogma and Dissent

RELN 331 (1/2 unit)
Adele S. Davidson, associate professor of English; Rhodes

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 cross-listed as ENGL 331.

Modern Catholicism

RELN 421 (1/2 unit)
Rhodes

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 John Paul II. The changing role of the papacy will be discussed in terms of historical statements, recent ecumenical exchanges with other Christian and non-Christian groups, and developing alternative models of the church. Catholic thought on

peace and social justice, sexual ethics, and the trends in spirituality will be traced, using theological, artistic, and literary sources. No prerequisites.

The Confucian Tradition

RELN 471 (1/2 unit)
Adler

This seminar explores the philosophical and cultural history of the Confucian tradition, primarily in China, from its inception to the present day. We will read both primary texts (from the "Five Classics" to the "New Confucians" of the twentieth century) and recent scholarly analyses. We will also examine the influences of Confucianism on East Asian economies, its involvement in the tension between tradition and modernity, and its influence on East Asian family dynamics and values. Among the general questions to be considered are: In what senses can Confucianism be considered a religious tradition? Which aspects of the tradition are culture-bound and which are more broadly applicable? Prerequisite: RELN 270 (Chinese Religions), RELN 472 (Taoism), or any history course on China or East Asia.

Individual Study

RELN 494 (1/2 unit)
Staff

Prerequisites: permission of instructor and department chair.

The following courses may be offered in 2003-04:

- RELN 211 Modern Judaism
- RELN 260 Buddhist Thought and Practice
- RELN 310 Hebrew Scriptures (The Old Testament)
- RELN 313 Souls on Fire: Jewish Mystical Expression
- RELN 320 Medieval Christianity
- RELN 321 The Reformation
- RELN 332 African-American Religions
- RELN 381 Meanings of Death
- RELN 382 Prophecy
- RELN 410 Women in Judaism

- RELN 421 Modern Catholicism
- RELN 422 Victorian Religion
- RELN 435 Religion and the Media
- RELN 441 Islam in Central Asia and the Turkic World
- RELN 472 Taoism
- RELN 480 Religious Communities: East and West

Courses in other departments that meet requirements for the Department of Religious Studies:

The list below is a sample of courses taught in other departments that may be counted as meeting religious studies department requirements for the major, up to 1 unit. Religious studies majors who wish to use these courses (or others) to satisfy requirements for the major must discuss them with their advisors and with the chair of the department.

- ANTH 252 Anthropology of Religion
- ARHS 111 Art of Christian Europe
- ASIA 490 The Silk Road Legacy
- CLAS 114 Classical Mythology
- CLAS 230 Greek and Roman Religion
- INDS 231 The Holocaust: An Interdisciplinary Inquiry
- ENGL 331 The Reformation and Literature: Dogma and Dissent
- PHIL 200 History of Ancient Philosophy
- PHIL 240 Philosophy of Religion
- SOCY 221 Religion in Modern Society
- SOCY 243 Ethics and Social Justice