Religious Studies Courses - Spring 2027

RE 103 Understanding Religions 3 Cr.

An in-depth introduction to the academic study of religion from a variety of perspectives, that attends to religion as a global, cross-cultural human phenomenon. Students will examine multiple traditions, geographical locations, and historical periods. Through close reading of texts, lecture, and discussion, students explore the religious lives of individuals and communities empathetically while also critically examining them within larger political, social, and cultural contexts. This semester, RE 103 will focus on four local expressions of religion – South Indian Hinduism, Thai Buddhism, Appalachian Protestant Christianity and Lakota Sioux religion. We will investigate both the intriguing patterns of similarity evident in religions across space and time, and their spectacular diversity, employing several theoretical lenses for understanding the complexity of lived religion at both an individual and social level.

Fulfills Global Cultural Perspective and Humanistic Inquiry requirements. Counts toward Asian Studies.

M/W 12:20-1:40 **E. Kent**

RE 103R Understanding Religions 4 Cr.

An in-depth investigation of religion as a global, cross-cultural phenomenon. Religions situate human actors in relation to nonhuman agents, and yet scholars of religion view religion as a profoundly human activity -- as something "made" not by gods and spirits but by people. In our effort to study religion both critically and empathetically, we examine traditions from different times and places, and we engage scholarly approaches that help us to consider religion from different perspectives. This semester, we focus on Santeria, an African diaspora tradition that emerged from the transatlantic slave trade, and on Sikhism, which originated in the Punjab and has since become the world's fifth largest religion.

Note: This course is offered as an Explorations in Religious Studies through Research.
Fulfills Global Cultural Perspective and Humanistic Inquiry requirements. Counts toward Asian Studies.

W/F 10:10-11:40 & M 10:10-11:05 **G. Spinner**

RE 105/105W Studying Religion in America

An exploration of the dimensions of American religious experience and identity through a focus on the definitions, debates, and power structures that have informed historical understandings of the term "religion" and the attendant implications for religious freedoms. While covering the range of religious experiences in America is surely too vast a topic for any one semester, this course nonetheless offers an introduction to a number of religious traditions to serve as jumping-off points for students' future study and research. Traditions could include Indigenous and Black religious traditions, as well as New Religious Movements (NRMs). Students will examine how Western colonial and Euro/Christocentric interpretations of religion have functioned to circumscribe and deny the rights of minority religious groups, and the need to employ a multicultural and decolonial lens when studying religions. In the process, students will gain familiarity with multiple interpretive and methodological frameworks, questions, and debates within the academic study of American religions including race, gender, sexuality, ritual, music, politics, religious freedom/oppression, appropriation, and cult vs. religion.

Fulfills Global Cultural Perspectives, Cultural Diversity and Humanistic Inquiry requirements

RE105 T/TH 9:40-11:00 3 credits **J. Padilioni Jr.**

RE105W M/W 2:30-3:50 4 credits **A. Prince**

RE 216R Asian Religions in America — 4 Cr.

An examination of Asian religions in the United States from the eighteenth century to the present day. To heighten awareness of the power and justice issues raised by course materials, students will investigate competing visions of the United States' national character as these visions have become increasingly controversial and polarized since the terrorist attacks of September 11th, 2001. Our examination of religions with roots in Asia (which may include South Asian Islam, Hinduism, Sikhism, Buddhism, Taoism and/or Confucianism) allows us to explore patterns in the representation of Asian religions in America, and responses and counter-representations from both Asian and non-Asian adherents. How have these representations supported, or undermined, the right to religious freedom of adherents of religions with roots in Asia? We conclude by exploring how Asian-Americans have. the years since the passage of the landmark 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act, adapted their religious traditions and communities to the United States.

Note: This course is offered as an Explorations in Religious Studies through Research.
Fulfills Humanistic Inquiry and Global Cultural Perspectives requirements; fulfills Bridge Experience requirement. Counts toward Asian Studies.

T/TH 9:40–11:00 & M 9:05–10:00 — **E. Kent**

RE 218 Hindu Myth and Media — 3 Cr.

An exploration of the Hindu gods and goddesses of India through their myths. For centuries Hindus, in India and around the world, have been telling stories about the gods through sacred scripture and folklore, granite sculpture and painted murals, and more recently in comic books, television series and films. Through close readings of Hindu mythic and epic texts communicated through diverse media, we gain an introduction to Hinduism as a dynamic, living religious tradition. Besides introducing students to the fascinating gods and goddesses of Hinduism through their stories, the course seeks to explore the politics of gendered visions of the divine, the entanglement of gender and caste in Hindu myth and society, and the effects of the medium on the transmission of religious messages, from the sacred Vedas, which were orally transmitted for centuries to contemporary Indian cinema.

Fulfills Humanistic Inquiry and Global Cultural Perspective requirements. Counts toward Asian Studies and Media and Film Studies.

M/W 10:10- 11:30 — **E. Kent**

RE 221 Buddhism: An Introduction — 3 Cr.

An introductory survey of the Buddhist tradition, focusing on its history and development, key doctrines and practices, geographic spread, and cultural adaptations. Students will examine the intellectual and philosophical history of Buddhism in detail as well as explore how Buddhism functions as a living, practical tradition.

Fulfills Humanistic Inquiry and Global Cultural Perspective requirements. Counts toward Asian Studies.

W/F 10:10-11:30 — **B. Bogin**

RE 226 Peoples Temple and Jonestown 4 Cr.

The growing body of materials related to the history of Peoples Temple, the media's ongoing fixation with the community and Jim Jones, the group's complex socialist negotiation of religion, race, class, and politics, and its perennial status as one of the most enduring examples of "cult" violence situates Peoples Temple as a culturally significant religio-political movement that invites investigation and careful consideration. Despite its primarily white leadership, Peoples Temple was one of the largest Black and interracial movements in United States history. This course offers an in-depth and engaged exploration of Peoples Temple history and the events at Jonestown with a special focus on the lived experiences of Black members and survivors. Students in this course will engage in transcription work to support the Jonestown Transcription Project, which contributes to the growing digital database of documents related to Peoples Temple and Jonestown.

Fulfills Humanistic Inquiry and Bridge Experience requirements.

M/W 4:00-5:20 **A. Prince**

RE 230 Bible Wars 3 Cr.

The Bible is often at the center of contentious issues within American culture. A constitutional ideal separating church and state is prescriptive rather than descriptive; many people today anchor their values in how they understand ancient texts. So this course provides a critical examination of what the Bible says, or does not say, on a range of polarizing topics, including abortion, capital punishment, women's rights, same sex relations, economic exploitation, immigrants, and Christian nationalism. Our primary goal when reviewing these topics is not to choose sides, but to better understand how biblical interpretations continue to impact contemporary society.

Fulfills Humanistic Inquiry requirement.

T/TH 2:10-3:30 **G. Spinner**

RE 230 Celestial Wonder and Planetary Ethics in American Religion 3 Cr.

By way of course readings, multimedia sources, and assignments, this class investigates the experience of celestial wonder as a primary impulse of American religious history. Through an affect theory frame that approaches religious experience through embodied emotions, this course chronicles several spectacular cosmic-planetary events in American history that so overwhelmed their observers that these experiences formed the basis of religious expression. We track the formation of American religious communities and religious ways of knowing that arose from encounters with the celestial spectacular. From these case studies that focus on the sky realm, students will appreciate the depth of the contest of meaning over the landscape of America that emerged from the antagonistic structural relations between indigenous Americans, European settler-colonists, and enslaved Africans. Students will interpret these events as an ecocritical commentary that demonstrates the planetary scale and scope of our human actions. This course offers students an opportunity to cultivate their own sensibilities of everyday wonder as a necessary response to the chief problem of the Anthropocene — human exceptionalism — and its attendant practices of ecological dominion, exploitation, extraction, and extinction.

Fulfills Humanistic Inquiry requirement. Counts toward ESS Cluster A.

W/F 8:40-10:00 **J. Padilioni Jr.**

RE 330 Things: Rethinking Material Culture 4 Cr.

A cross-cultural and interdisciplinary exploration of special objects that people make, use, and possibly worship. Our study probes conventional distinctions made between religion and magic, art and artifact, and object and person. Drawing upon Religious Studies, Classics, Art History, and Anthropology, case studies include Hindu and Zuni statues, Catholic reliquaries, Kongo 'fetishes,' Thai Buddhist amulets, Bamana door-locks, Haitian bottles, Zande hunting nets, Klan robes, and the Parthenon Marbles. Examining these and other objects, we will attend to colonialist assumptions about how objects should be classified and collected. Students will workshop research papers, with ample leeway to choose topics geared to their majors and specific interests.

Prerequisite: One previous Religious Studies or Art History course or CC220.

Fulfills Global Cultural Perspectives requirement. Counts toward Art History, Classics and the Theory and Method requirement in the RE major.

M/W 2:30-4:20 **G. Spinner**

RE 330 Possessions: Bodies and Spirits of the African Diaspora 4 Cr.

This course investigates the phenomenon of spirit possession across African Diasporic religious traditions. This notion of "possession" contains a double meaning, referring in one register to ritual phenomena of trance, ecstasy, and other such embodied engagements with spirits and other entities of the Africana divine. In a second register, the notion of "possession" chains the emergence of African Diasporic religious traditions to the tragic history of the Transatlantic Slave Trade and its logic of racial capitalism that sold Black bodies as commodities to masters who claimed them as possessions and property. Furthermore, religious studies scholars, anthropologists, missionaries, and colonial administrators of the 19th and 20th century, alike, identified "spirit possession" as a hallmark of Africana peoples, justifying the racist premises of white supremacy that held African personhood as inferior, primitive, and animistic/animalistic when juxtaposed to the supposed rational premises of (particularly) Euroamerican Protestant Christianity. By way of ethnographic field reports, films, digital media, and readings in critical race theory, kinesthetics and the ritual sensorium, and psycho-spiritual frameworks of personhood and co-presence, students will untangle the colonial trope of Black spirit possession and reinterpret this ritual phenomena via Afrocentric and Black and Latine feminist-womanist/mujerista perspectives to discover what spiritist practices can teach us about the infinite nature of being/consciousness, materiality and embodiment, and how to pursue a flourishing life in ancestral community.

Prerequisite: students should have taken at least one course in RE OR any one of the following departments/programs: Black Studies, LACLAS, gender and sexuality studies, American Studies, or anthropology OR get instructor's permission

Fulfills Humanistic Inquiry and Global Cultural Perspectives requirements. Counts toward Black Studies and Gender Studies.

W/F 10:10-12:00 **J. Padilioni Jr.**

Also counting toward Religious Studies:

AH 104 Ways of Seeing: Survey of Asian Art 4 Cr.

Survey of the arts of South Asia, China, and Japan. These visual cultures will be examined through an ecocritical lens, while examining style as social-political expression, the roles of objects in religious contexts, and the impacts of cross-cultural exchange.

Fulfils Humanistic Inquiry and Global Cultural Perspectives requirements. Counts for AS major/minor and RE major. Counts for 100-level requirement in AH major.

Sec. 001 &002 T/TH 12:40 – 2:00 & M 12:20-1:15 (001) or M 1:25-2:20 (002) **S. Waraich**

AH 251C African Masks from Performance to Display 3 Cr.

Explores the creation, performance, and display of masks in in a diverse range of cultures and time periods across the African continent. Students will discover how masks manifest ideas and forces beyond the realm of human experience and relate to politics, religion, aesthetics, colonialism, and art history. Students will study masked performances as embodied artworks created in space and time that uphold or challenge social hierarchies, engage ancestral presence, and reflect and shape gendered power dynamics. Students will consider how masks have been collected and exhibited within museum contexts, including the Tang Museum, and how masks continue to shape contemporary African art and society.

Fulfills Humanistic Inquiry and Global Cultural Perspectives requirements. Counts for BST minor, IA cultural world cluster, and RE major. Counts for Breadth category D in AH major.

T/TH 2:10 – 3:30 **T. Lieber**

AN 251E Anthropology of Religious Extremism 4 Cr.

This course will introduce students to literature coming from anthropology, religious studies, and the interdisciplinary study of "extremism". The course will provide students with a foundation for doing anthropological fieldwork and for thinking critically both about this thing that permeates our world called "religion" as well as the ways it "goes wrong," verging into "extremism" or "fundamentalism." Together, students will consider what extremism looks like, what garbs it wears that may be familiar to us, and how the logics produced around certain, readily identifiable "extremisms" can be unexpectedly applied to other behaviors that are not frequently framed as "fundamentalist" or "extremist." The course will reflect on why some fundamentalisms are particularly widely discussed and condemned––by whom and when?––as well as how we might interrogate the deployment of the terms themselves.

Fulfills Global Cultural Perspectives and Humanistic Inquiry requirements. Counts toward Religious Studies.

T/TH 3:40 – 5:30 **L. Thompson**

AS 351 Tibetan Buddhism 4 Cr.

An introduction to some of the major themes in Tibetan Buddhist thought and practice. Readings will consist of primary texts in translation supplemented by secondary literature on the study of Tibetan Buddhism. Topics to be considered include the role of Buddhism in Tibetan social and political histories; ritual, art, and architecture; poetry and philosophy; gender and identity; and the transnational transformations of Tibetan Buddhism in the contemporary world.

Fulfills Global Cultural Perspectives and Humanistic Inquiry requirements. Counts toward Religious Studies.

T/TH 9:10 – 11:00 **B. Bogin**

About Explorations in Religious Studies

Starting in Spring 2021, you will see that some of our courses are enhanced by a fourth hour of credit. Religious Studies courses that ordinarily carry 3 credit hours may carry 4 credit hours when they have a fourth contact hour of class or when they engage students in sustained explorations in Religious Studies outside of class. Such courses develop particular student skills and offer a distinctive approach to learning. Explorations in Religious Studies courses are so designated in the master schedule and follow one of the following models:

Exploration of Religious Studies through Research (designated RE XXX (R)): Students design and execute independent research projects, developing research questions and honing the research skills necessary to answer them by identifying and assessing primary and/or secondary sources (including scholarly literature) and preparing interim analyses (such as thesis statements, bibliographies, literature reviews, drafts). Students typically deliver their research findings through both written and oral presentations, but also as short videos, podcasts, or by updating Wikipedia pages.

Exploration of Religious Studies through Writing (designated RE XXX (W)): Students spend additional time drafting, critiquing and revising papers in order to foster their skills in analysis, interpretation and persuasion. In order to heighten attention to the craft of writing, students attend not only to content but also to style and voice in their papers.

Exploration of Religious Studies through Collaborative Learning (designated RE XXX (L)): Students spend three hours each week in addition to class time in small group activities, working collectively or independently to contribute to group projects. This time will be devoted to group meetings, independent work, and meetings with the instructor to advance group projects. Products of this work will be assessed by the instructor via group presentations or project papers written collaboratively (with group members individually contributing components of a multi-part paper, or independently writing separate papers based on the group project). Collaborative Learning in Religious Studies accommodates a wide range of cooperative group structures varying by length, membership, and size, as well as varying formats for assessment including individual and group grades.

Exploration of Religious Studies through Critical Perspectives (designated RE XXX (P)): Students study films, listen to public lectures, read novels, and/or make field trips to enrich their understanding of religion, and submit critical reports on what they have learned in written or oral presentations.

For more information about Religious Studies courses, the major or minor, visit https://www.skidmore.edu/religious_studies/index.php