

Religious Studies Courses - Spring 2026

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.

T/TH 12:40 - 2:00

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.

W/F 12:20 - 1:40 & M 12:20-1:15

G. Spinner

RE 105W Studying Religion in America

4 Cr.

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.

Note: This course is offered as an Explorations in Religious Studies through Writing.

Fulfills Global Cultural Perspectives, Cultural Diversity and Humanistic Inquiry requirements

w/F 10:10 – 11:30

A. Prince

RE 206 Religion and the Scientific Imagination**4 Cr.**

An inquiry into the relationship between religion and science, as the terms were formed in the colonial West. Do religion and science exist in conflict, or are they in harmony? What does it mean for a truth claim to travel between religion and science? What kinds of healing are effective—and why are some forms of healing considered more legitimate than others? Why is everyone so into Oppenheimer? Is artificial intelligence a sign of the apocalypse? Is science secular? And what about UFOs? Students will encounter these questions as we explore many ways that "religion" and "science" have interacted, conflicted, collided, and combined. We focus primarily on the nineteenth and twentieth century United States and foreground themes of power, justice, and feminist and anti-racist critique.

Prerequisite: **SSP100.** *Fulfills Humanities requirement; fulfills Bridge Experience requirement; fulfills Theory and Method requirement for Religious Studies majors. Counts toward Gender Studies.*

T/TH 3:40 – 5:30

A. Renna

RE 209 Indigenous Religious Freedom**3 Cr.**

An exploration of the ongoing cultural and legal contests over Indigenous sacred lands, mountains, waters, plant medicines, ceremonies and graves in the United States with a focus on the 20th century. We will employ decolonial historical methods to examine Native peoples' ongoing struggles for religious freedom. Topics include the American Indian Religious Freedom Act (AIRFA), the Native American Church and the sacrament of peyote, Native access to sacred sites on public and federal lands, the contest over Mauna Kea, the Dakota Access Pipeline Protests, and NAGPRA (Native American Graves Protection Act). We will also examine contemporary Native cultural revitalization and reclamation of ancestral Native lands. As part of the course, students will engage with transcription work to support the Kanatsiohareke Archives project with MDOCS.

Fulfills Bridge Experience and Humanistic Inquiry requirement. Counts toward American Studies and Environmental Studies.

W/F 12:20 – 1:40

A. Prince

RE 217R Health and Healing in Asia**4 Cr.**

An exploration of Asian medical systems and practices including Yoga, Ayurveda, Falun Gong, and Traditional Chinese Medicine, all of which are grounded in the belief that the body is a microcosm of universal, macrocosmic processes. How do conceptualizations of disease affect our experience of it? Does the way we imagine disease reflect larger social processes, such as those based on gender or class? Students examine the religious underpinnings of the models of the body that people in China and India have used for centuries to heal from illness, maintain good health, and, in some cases, aspire to a state of super-health that transcends the limitations of bodily existence altogether. We also consider how these traditions change when they are transmitted from Asia to the US under the rubric of "alternative health practices."

Note: Offered through Explorations is Religious Study through Research

Fulfills Humanistic Inquiry, Cultural Diversity and Global Cultural Perspectives requirements. Counts toward Asian Studies.

T/TH 9:10 – 11:00

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 8:40 – 10:00

B. Bogin

RE 225 Religion and Ecology**3 Cr.**

Explores the intersection of religion and ecology by examining causes of the environmental crisis, how views of nature are conditioned by culture and religion, and the response from naturalists, scientists, and religionists who are concerned about the environmental crisis. The lectures and readings will approach these issues from a variety of religious perspectives and will include Jewish, Christian, Muslim, Buddhist, Hindu, Native American, feminist, pragmatist, and scientific voices.

Fulfills Humanistic Inquiry requirement. Counts toward Environmental Sciences and Studies.

T/TH 2:10 – 3:30

A. Renna

RE 230 Risk**3 Cr.**

This course is a one-time interdisciplinary topics seminar on the cultural history of risk in the US. Anthropologist Mary Douglas called risk the "secular god of modernity," because "risk" has come to occupy a place in culture where decision-making bodies contain powerful unknowns and uncertainties. Ideas of risk have mobilized the history of US science, corporate regulation, and international diplomatic agreements. They have shaped private and public sector responses to warfare, climate crisis, and social unrest. But what is a risk? What has to be necessary for risks to be constructed, and addressed? How did Americans start thinking about problems of collective life in terms of risk? Who gets to decide what a risk is? And how did risk shape the specific kinds of solutions they imagined? How might we imagine better ways of developing and addressing risks in our society? This course will draw from anthropology, history, literature, religious studies, science studies, critical race studies, indigenous studies, and postcolonial studies. Students should expect to read widely through disciplines, complete weekly writing synthesizing their positions on risk scholarship, and engage in intensive seminar discussion. They will write a substantive final paper.

Fulfills Humanistic Inquiry requirement. Counts toward Environmental Sciences and Studies.

W 4:00 – 7:00

A. Renna

RE 230R Jesus**4 Cr.**

A critical examination of both canonical and non-canonical sources. Taken chronologically, these sometimes-competing sources trace the historical development of early Christianity. We are not here undertaking a quest for a singular, historical Jesus, but surveying multiple versions of Jesus -- including Gnostic, Muslim, and Jewish representations -- that circulated in late Antiquity and the early Middle Ages.

Fulfills Humanistic Inquiry requirement.

M/W 2:30 – 4:20

G. Spinner

RE 321 Buddhism and the Body: Desire, Disgust and Transcendence**4 Cr.**

An exploration of the ways that Buddhists have constructed, disciplined, despised, and venerated the human body. We will explore the Buddhist body in its various incarnations: the disciplined monastic body of monks and nuns; the hyper-masculine body of the Buddha; the sacred corpses of saints; the body given away in sacrifice; the body as marker of virtue, and vice; the sexual body; the body transfigured in ritual; and the body analyzed and scrutinized in medical traditions.

Prerequisites: One course in Religious Studies OR one course in Gender Studies OR one course in Asian Studies.

Fulfills Humanistic Inquiry and Global Cultural Perspectives requirements and the Theory & Method requirement in the Religious Studies major. Counts toward Asian Studies and Gender Studies.

T/TH 3:40 – 5:30

R. Overbey

RE 330 Goddesses**4 Cr.**

An examination of the feminine divine as it finds expression in cultures across space and time. As a comparative investigation of goddesses in selected societies, we will read myths, ethnographies and scholarly studies that explore the theological and political possibilities of female divinity. We will also explore how people in particular socio-historical contexts – scholars, people of faith, men, women and nonbinary individuals - have drawn on goddess mythology, symbolism and ritual in order to challenge, or justify, established norms surrounding gender, race, religion and power.

Pre-requisite: One prior RE or GW course or instructor permission.

Fulfills Global Cultural Perspectives requirement. Counts toward Gender Studies. Fulfills the Theory & Method requirement in the Religious Studies major.

W/F 10:10 - 12:00

E. Kent

Also counting toward Religious Studies:

AS 351 The Dalai Lama: Buddhism, Politics & Global Celebrity	3 Cr.
An exploration of the Fourteenth Dalai Lama, Tenzin Gyatso (b. 1935), as a Tibetan Buddhist teacher, political leader, and global celebrity. Readings will consist of books authored by the Dalai Lama supplemented by secondary literature on his life and work. Topics to be considered include the successive reincarnations of the Dalai Lama throughout Tibetan history; international politics from the events leading to the Dalai Lama's exile in 1959 up to the present day; Buddhist ritual, philosophy, and ethics; and the transnational transformations of Tibetan Buddhism in the contemporary world. <i>Fulfills Humanistic Inquiry and Global Cultural Perspectives requirement. Counts toward Religious Studies and International Affairs.</i>	
T/TH 12:40 – 2:00	B. Bogin

IA 353 Afrophobia and Africana Religions	4 Cr.
An exploration of Africana religions in the context of Afrophobia. Africana or African-derived religions and their devotees have been historically persecuted and vilified around the world. Religious scholar Dianne M. Stewart (2005) has coined the term Afrophobia to describe anti-African sentiment and fear of Africana religions. This course examines Afrophobia as an essential aspect of anti-Black racism that has sought to eradicate alternative spiritual worldviews and stifle Black liberation. The course will introduce some basic theologies, symbols, and principals of Africana religions. We will also explore the roots of Afrophobia as well as the relationship between anti-Black racism and religious intolerance targeting non-Abrahamic, indigenous African religions. <i>Fulfills Breadth and Depth Cultural World for International Affairs. Fulfills Global Cultural Perspectives and Humanistic Inquiry requirements. Counts toward Black Studies and Religious Studies.</i>	
T/TH 12:40 – 2:00 & M 12:20 – 1:15	R. Cantave

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, click [here](#).