

Religious Studies

Course Offerings – Spring 2022

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/Lucumi, an Afro-Caribbean 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 towards International Affairs.

T/TH 11:10 - 12:30 M 11:15 - 12:10

G. Spinner

RE 105W American Gods: Religious Diversity in the U.S.

4 Cr.

What is an “American” religion? What do people mean when they refer to the United States as a site of “religious diversity” or “religious freedom”? This course explores these questions, with special attention to how issues of religion are shaped by dynamics of race, gender, sexuality, and nation. Students will encounter key players in the religious history of the Americas and build a toolbox for interpreting the interplay of religion, culture, and politics more broadly.

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

Fulfills Global Cultural Perspectives, Cultural Diversity and Humanistic Inquiry requirements; counts towards American Studies.

Sec. 001 T/TH 8:10 – 9:30am

Sec. 002 T/TH 9:40-11:00am

L. Hulsether

RE 218R Hindu Myth

4 Cr.

This course is an exploration of the Hindu gods and goddesses of India through their myths. For centuries Indians have been telling stories about the gods through sacred scripture, folklore and pilgrimage traditions, and more recently in comic books, television series and films. Through close readings of India’s mythic and epic texts communicated through diverse media, we gain an introduction to Hinduism as a dynamic, living religious tradition. Anyone attempting to understand the complexities of Indian culture, politics and society will soon encounter the gods and goddesses of the Hindu tradition. Besides introducing students to these fascinating figures and their stories, the course seeks to explore broader topics in the study of religion including theories of myth, the politics of gendered visions of the divine and the effects of the medium on the transmission of religious messages.

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

Fulfills Humanistic Inquiry, Global Cultural Perspective, non-Western requirements; counts toward Asian Studies.

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

E. Kent

RE 221 Buddhism: An Introduction**3 Cr.**

An introductory survey to 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, with an emphasis on material culture.

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

M/W 2:30 – 3:50pm

S. Kerekes

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

An exploration of the critical connections between religion and the natural environment. How do religious beliefs, symbol systems, and ritual behaviors shape human perceptions of, and interactions with, animals and the nonhuman environment? How might the perspectives, concepts and community-building power provided by religions help us to address specific local and global environmental concerns? Using primary texts drawn from a variety of religious traditions, and writings from a broad spectrum of historical and contemporary naturalists, poets and theologians, the course will cover such topics as climate change denialism, ecofeminism, and religiously-engaged environmental activism. In addition, we will analyze case studies that feature how people of faith have drawn on the ethical and theological resources of their traditions to reimagine our relationship to non-human nature – from the Native American – led water protectors movement at Standing Rock to Pope Francis' landmark encyclical, *Laudato Si: On Care for Our Common Home*.

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

M/W/F 10:10 – 11:05am

E. Kent

RE 230C-001 Cults, Mysteries & Magic: Ritual in Ancient Greece and Rome**3 Cr.**

An introductory survey of rituals in ancient Greece and Rome. Connecting material culture to textual evidence, the course paints a fascinating portrait of how ritual actions profoundly inform both public and private life in the classical world. Covering procedures as diverse as sacrifice, libation, prophetic oracles, divining with birds and with entrails, dream incubation, public games, and worshipping emperors, we analyze how ritual activity impacts identity and constructs authority. Given their contexts in patriarchal, slaveholding societies, we attend to how gender and status effect access to the sacred, as well as examine how magical practices might provide alternative means for wielding power. Furthermore, we consider whether calling these practices “religious” illuminates or obscures their undeniable import in antiquity.

Fulfills Humanistic Inquiry and humanities requirement. Counts toward Classics.

T/TH 2:10 – 3:30pm

G. Spinner

RE 241 Theorizing the Sacred

4 Cr.

An introduction to the theory and methods of the study of religion, which is open to religious studies students but is appropriate for all students who seek to build their critical vocabularies around this category and the many others that intersect with it. We will engage foundational works of philosophy and cultural theory—with an emphasis on feminist, anti-racist reading practices—and put them in conversation with contemporary approaches and critiques. We interrogate the meaning of “religion” as a popular discourse, and we will reflect on its potential as a lens for understanding relations of social power. This semester, we will put special focus on the historical dynamics of empire and colonialism, as well as the plural interventions of postcolonial and decolonial analysis.

Note: this is a 4-credit course that meets for 3 hours per week. The extra “flexible” fourth credit hour (listed as Wednesday 6:30pm-7:25pm) involves only asynchronous work, so students should not worry about conflicts with this time.

Fulfills Humanistic Inquiry and humanities requirement.

T/TH 12:40 - 2:00pm & W 6:30-7:25pm

L. Hulsether

RE 330D-001 Spiritual But Not Religious (SBNR)

4 Cr.

Mindfulness, Transcendental Meditation, yoga, energy healing, and esoteric arts like astrology and tarot are some of the practices followed by Millennials and Gen-Zers who identify as “spiritual but not religious” (SBNR). According to a 2017 Pew Research, one out of five Americans reject any religious affiliation and claim to be “spiritual but not religious”. But, what exactly does this mean? What counts as “spiritual”? Do the growing number of SBNRs reflect something more than dissenting from organized religion? Is SBNR just an American spiritual buffet that largely appropriates and romanticizes Eastern traditions, cherry-picking practices without bearing the communal or ethical responsibilities assumed by a religious adherent to a particular institution or tradition? Or is this a new variety of religiosity suited to individualistic values of capitalism and globalization? This course attempts to answer these questions and more through communal exploration and experiment. We begin with the scholarly debate over defining terms: what is “religion” versus “spirituality”? versus “occult”? Then we examine the historical context of the rise of American spirituality from its nineteenth-century roots to the 1960s counter-culture, and go on to examine contemporary contexts, especially commercialization, from a global perspective. Case studies include Transcendental Meditation and mindfulness movement in America, Pranic Healing (particularly in the Philippines and India), Japan’s Seichō no Ie, as well as astrology. Students will conduct ethnographic research about the SBNR culture on campus and/or on social media among their peers.

Prerequisite: One prior Religious Studies course or permission of the instructor.

Counts toward Asian Studies.

M/W 4:00 – 5:50pm

S. Kerekes

RE330D-002 Eve, Lilith and the Androgyne**4 Cr.**

Was there sex in the Garden of Eden? Did it involve Lilith? What about the Serpent?

While the story of Adam and Eve is one of the most widely recognized stories in the world, it is not necessarily as widely understood. Different readers have arrived at some surprising, and surprisingly different, answers to the questions asked above. This course surveys the wide range of interpretations of Genesis 1-4, opening up discussions about sex and celibacy, androgyny and gender roles, knowledge and authority. The same set of biblical texts taken by some as a charter for egalitarian relationships gets invoked by others to subordinate women or to defend slavery. Canvassing a wide range of religious history, our study is anchored by feminist and queer theories and buoyed by critical thinking.

Prerequisites: One prior Religious Studies course or permission of the instructor. Counts towards Gender Studies.

W/F 12:20 – 2:10

G. Spinner

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](#).