RELIGIOUS STUDIES

Faculty: Brown, Chair; Breitenberg, Girdner, and Polaski.

The phenomenon of religion is a near universal dimension of human life and culture. Belief in a sacred dimension of life has inspired drama, dance, painting, poetry, and rituals involved in birth, initiation into adulthood, marriage, and death. Humankind's values, history, cultures, morals, hopes, fears, and worldviews would be incomprehensible without an understanding of the religious and spiritual systems and symbols underlying them. It is, therefore, essential that a well-educated person be exposed to the study of religion. Through the academic discipline of religious studies, the student confronts religion and spirituality in all its complexity and diversity. Through this involved and involving study, the student develops critical and analytical skills.

Moreover, the study of religion challenges the student to strive for humanity's highest moral and ethical ideals, and nourishes the uniquely human resources of creativity and imagination. In this way, religious studies enables students to synthesize what they learn with who they are, and who they ought to become. The study of religion is, therefore, an integral part of the liberal arts curriculum at Randolph-Macon College.

- Religious Studies Major (https://catalog.rmc.edu/programs/religious-studies/religious-studies-major/)
- Religious Studies Minor (https://catalog.rmc.edu/programs/religious-studies/religious-studies-minor/)

RELS 105 - Introduction to Religion (3 Hours)
An inquiry into the nature of religious experience and expression. Themes to be considered include interpretations of the term "religion," theories of the origin of religion, myth and ritual, religious language, religious communities, religion and society.
Curriculum: HC,HU

RELS 111 - Biblical Hebrew (3 Hours)
This course is a formal introduction to the basic rules and principles of Biblical Hebrew that is designed to facilitate critical reading of the Hebrew Bible. Emphases will be placed upon recognition and translation, employing a controlled vocabulary that consists of the most common Hebrew words and forms. Every class session will entail oral reading (some of which students will be required to tape) and writing exercises from the primary (i.e., Hebrew Bible) and/or resource (i.e., grammar book) texts. The premise of the course is that grammatical and literary analyses of the Hebrew texts are facilitated and complemented by writing Hebrew, including translating Hebrew into English, and that learning the language requires vocalization. Area One: Biblical Studies. Offered every two or three years.
Curriculum: FL

RELS 112 - Biblical Hebrew (3 Hours)
This course is the sequel to RELS 111 and is designed to focus upon the principles of syntax and to further reading skills. Students will apply the rules and principles of Biblical Hebrew and thereby employ grammatical insights in reading and analyzing selected passages from the Hebrew Bible. This analysis will entail oral reading (some of which students will be required to tape) and diagramming of sentences from the Hebrew Bible. The premise of the course is that grammatical and literary analyses of the Hebrew texts are facilitated and complemented by writing Hebrew and that learning the language requires vocalization. The primary objective of the course is textual, grammatical, and literary criticism of the Hebrew Bible. Area One: Biblical Studies. Offered every two or three years.
Prerequisite(s): RELS 111

Curriculum: FL

RELS 211 - Hebrew Bible/Old Testament (3 Hours)
The Hebrew Bible: History and Literature A survey of the Hebrew Bible (the Jewish Tanakh and the Christian Old Testament) that gives attention to the development of this literature in ancient Israel and early Judaism and to the significance of these writings in their own times. Area One: Biblical Studies.
Curriculum: AE,HU,NW

RELS 212 - The New Testament: History and Literature (3 Hours)
A survey of the New Testament that gives attention to the development of this literature in Jewish and early Christian communities and to the significance of these writings in their own times. Area One: Biblical Studies.
Curriculum: AE,HU

RELS 213 - Life and Teaching of Jesus (3 Hours)
This course explores sources for understanding Jesus of Nazareth, especially early Christian gospels, and how these sources may be interpreted to give various pictures of his life and teachings. We will consider such matters as Jesus' social location, his Jewish identity, his self-understanding, and his ethics. Area One: Biblical Studies. Offered occasionally.
Curriculum: HC,HU

RELS 214 - Life and Letters of Paul (3 Hours)
A study of the Pauline Epistles and current thought concerning the Apostle Paul. Special attention is given to his contribution to the development of Christian thought and its relevance to our day. Students will be expected to familiarize themselves with the major problems of Pauline studies and current scholarship regarding them. Area One: Biblical Studies. Offered every two or three years.
Curriculum: HC,HU

RELS 215 - The Bible and Film (3 Hours)
This course investigates the use of the Bible in film. Movies will be studied and critiqued in light of their corresponding biblical texts in order to discern ways the Bible may be appropriated in modern cultures. Area One: Biblical Studies. Offered every two or three years.
Curriculum: AE,HU

RELS 216 - Sex, Gender, and the Bible (3 Hours)
A study of gender and sexuality in Jewish and Christian Scriptures. This course focuses on ways this literature moves readers to adopt various ideas about gender. Attention will be given to the construction of gender in ancient Israel, early Judaism and early Christian communities, as well as to the relation between these texts and modern readers.
Curriculum: HC,HU

RELS 217 - The Bible in America (3 Hours)
An investigation of the Bible's influence on American society, paying attention to how interpretations of the Bible have both reflected and challenged American culture. Area One: Biblical Studies. Offered every two or three years.
Curriculum: CL,HU,OC

RELS 218 - Biblical Short Stories (3 Hours)
This course examines narrative texts from the period during which Judaism emerged (515 BCE-70 CE). Stories are drawn from the Hebrew Bible, the Apocrypha, and other ancient sources. We will read these texts as narratives, exploring their literary artistry, but will also consider what they might say about the development of religious identity. Area One: Biblical Studies. Offered every two or three years.
Curriculum: AE,HU

RELS 219 - The Book of Revelation (3 Hours)
A study of the book of Revelation, also called the Apocalypse, from the Christian New Testament. Revelation is investigated as an example of ancient apocalyptic discourse, through reading other apocalyptic texts and sociological studies of apocalypticism. Consideration is also given to ways this book has been interpreted in our present era. The major focus of the course, however, will be the close reading of Revelation itself. Area One: Biblical Studies. Offered every three years.
Curriculum: HC,HU

RELS 221 - World Religions: Indian, Buddhist, Chinese, Japanese (3 Hours)
An examination of the history, beliefs, and practices of living religions of the world: Hinduism, Buddhism, Taoism, Confucianism, Shinto, and Jainism. Consideration will be given to the variety of answers offered to life's questions, and to the present encounter of world religions. Both primary and secondary sources will be used in learning the basic vocabulary, critical problems, and current state of each of the religions studied. Area Two: World's Religious Traditions.
Curriculum: GE,HU,NW

RELS 222 - World Religions: Judaic, Christian, Islamic (3 Hours)
An examination of the history, literature, beliefs, and practices of living religions of the world: Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Zoroastrianism, and Bahai. Consideration will be given to the variety of answers offered to life's basic questions, and to the present encounter of world religions. Both primary and secondary sources will be used in learning the basic vocabulary, critical problems, and current state of each of the religions studied. Area Two: World's Religious Traditions.
Curriculum: HC,HU

RELS 223 - Hinduism: History, Teachings, Practice (3 Hours)
This course provides a thorough introduction to the diverse worlds of Hinduism. Through an exploration of the many layers of religious ideas and practices and the historical circumstances from which they emerge, students will gain an appreciation of the rich and pluralistic Hindu tradition of India and beyond. To accomplish this, students will carry out an inquiry that will range from archeological evidence of the oldest layers of the religious life in India to the arrival of the Vedas, the composition of the Upanisads and the Epics, the emergence of the great devotional gods and goddesses, and to the everyday practices of Hindus today. Finally, the course will examine the Hindu diaspora, with a particular emphasis on Hindus in America and the continuing influence Hinduism exerts on the American religious imagination. Area Two: World's Religious Traditions. Offered every two or three years.
Curriculum: GE,HU,NW

RELS 225 - Buddhism: History, Teachings, Practice (3 Hours)
This course provides a thorough introduction to the diverse worlds of Buddhism. Through an exploration of the life and teachings of its founder, as well as the historical and religious context of India out of which the tradition emerges, students will gain an understanding of Buddhism's fundamental claims and practices. By studying the spread of Buddhism into East and Southeast Asia and how these cultures shaped their own unique forms of tradition, students will obtain an appreciation for the tremendous impact this religion has had in countries such as China, Korea, Japan, Tibet, Sri Lanka, and Myanmar. Finally, the course will examine the arrival of Buddhism in America and the growing influence it is exerting on the American religious imagination. Area Two: World's Religious Traditions. Offered every two or three years.
Curriculum: GE,HU,NW

RELS 227 - Islam (3 Hours)
This course is an introduction to and overview of Islam, from its beginnings to the present. The class examines the origins of Islam, the content and significance of the Qur'an, the role of Muhammad and the primary beliefs and practices of Muslims throughout the centuries. Students will study the development and expansion of Islam and its impact on politics, law, families, the arts and sciences, and other areas of society around the world. Students will learn about various groups within the Islamic tradition, such as Sunni, Shi', Sufi, and The Nation of Islam. They will examine the relationship of Islam to other religions and the continuing importance of Islam throughout the world today. Area Two: World's Religious Traditions. Offered every two or three years.
Curriculum: GE,HU,NW

RELS 228 - New Religious Movements (3 Hours)
This course examines the significance of the dramatic rise in New Religious Movements (NRMs) over the past century. With a focus on both the American and global scene, students will explore the following questions: What is the value of studying NRMs and what can they tell us about the dynamics of cultures, religions, and religion? What exactly are NRMs, what forms do they take, into what types can they be divided, and how are they differentiated from other religious traditions or movements? What historical and cultural conditions gave rise to such a burgeoning of NRMs in the past century? How have NRMs been perceived by traditional religions and by the wider population (e.g., as "cults" prone to brainwashing, violence, and sexual deviance)? Who generally joins such movements and why? What is the future of NRMs and what do they suggest about the future of religion? In the process of this inquiry, students will become acquainted with the history, beliefs, and practices of many NRMs throughout the world, such as Wicca, the New Age Movement, Eco-religions, Branch Davidians, People's Temple, Soka Gakkai, Falun Gong, Aum Shinrikyo, Heaven's Gate, Scientology, Santeria and Rastafarianism. Area Two: World's Religious Traditions. Offered every two or three years.
Curriculum: GE,HU

RELS 229 - Native American Religions (3 Hours)
This course will introduce students to the diverse religious traditions of the Native Americans. First, students will explore the variety of tribal traditions and their religious ties to the landscape. Second, the course will examine the importance of Christianity across the Native American traditions. Third, it will study the formation of new religious movements that extend beyond tribal ties. Finally, students will look at recent attempts by Native people to create a pan-Native American religious identity or spirituality that is frequently posed as an alternative to modern, Western culture. Area Two: World's Religious Traditions. Offered every two or three years.
Curriculum: HC,HU,NW

RELS 230 - Judaism (3 Hours)
A general introduction to the Jewish faith. The course will give attention to the emergence, structure, and content of the vast body of Jewish literature, beginning with the Hebrew Bible; basic Jewish tenets covering aspects of Jewish law and customs, including the Jewish calendar and the festival cycle in particular; major Jewish events and personalities shaping Jewish history and destiny. Area Two: The World's Religious Traditions. Offered every two or three years.
Curriculum: HC,HU

RELS 231 - Christianity (3 Hours)
An introduction to Christianity, from its beginnings to the present. We will learn about the Christian faith and practice through an overview of the religion's scripture, history, worship, institutions, theology, and teachings, and give attention to many of Christianity's most important and influential persons, groups, and movements. We will study interactions between Christianity and the cultures and societies in which it arose and developed, trace the religion's spread throughout the world, and reflect on the challenges and opportunities confronting Christianity today. Area Two: World's Religious Traditions. Offered every two or three years.
Curriculum: HC,HU

RELS 232 - History of Christianity from the Early Church to the Protestant Refo (3 Hours)
A survey of the development of the Christian Church from the 2nd century to the beginning of the Protestant Reformation. Particular attention will be given to theological controversies and Church Councils, the expansion of the Church into the West in the early Middle Ages, the relationships between Western and Eastern Churches, the Crusades, monasticism, and the influence of the Renaissance. Area Two: World's Religious Traditions. Offered every two or three years.
Curriculum: HC,HU

RELS 233 - History of Christianity from the Protestant Reformation to Present (3 Hours)
Attention will be given to the rise and development of denominations, major theologies, controversies, and trends. Topics explored will also include the Counter Reformation, the Great Awakening, conflicts between science and religion, fundamentalism, liberalism, ecumenism, and third world developments. Area Two: World's Religious Traditions. Offered every two or three years.
Curriculum: HC,HU

RELS 235 - Religious Ethics (3 Hours)
An introduction to religious ethics, as both a field of study and a way of life. By examining the ethics of major living world religions, students will learn about the relationship between religious faith and practice and personal and social ethics. We will study ways in which religious traditions and faith communities, in different cultural and historical contexts, affect moral action and decision making and the relationship of these to specific and basic ethical concerns of the human community. We will also investigate how major living religious traditions understand and address specific ethical issues, such as war, economics, marriage and families, and the environment. Area Three: Religion and Culture.
Curriculum: GE,HU,NW

RELS 237 - Christian Ethics (3 Hours)
This course examines how the Christian tradition, past and present, understands and teaches how Christians should live, what they should and should not do, and the kinds of persons they should be. We will study the development of Christian ethics and consider similarities and differences between Protestant and Catholic approaches. Persistent and contemporary moral issues and concerns will be addressed such as war and peace, terrorism, economics, the environment, globalization, capital punishment, euthanasia, abortion, and cloning along with various Christian responses to them. Area Three: Religion and Culture.
Curriculum: CL,HU

RELS 242 - Archaeology of Israel (3 Hours)
The history of Israel spans all of human history: the Paleolithic burials in the Carmel Caves, early farming settlements at Ohalo II and Ain Mallaha, the Bronze Age sites of the Philistines, the Iron Age City of David, Hellenistic Greek remains from the period of the Maccabean Revolt, Roman aqueducts and cemeteries, the Jewish fortress at Masada, early Christian churches, monuments of the early Islamic period such as the Dome of the Rock, and the castles of European Crusaders. This course will survey the archaeology of Israel, and will consider how the archaeological record supplements and contradicts the written histories of a land claimed and contested by numerous ethnic and religious populations over the centuries. Israel's place in the Roman world will be highlighted.
Curriculum: EL

RELS 246 - Jewish and Christian Identities in Ancient Israel/Palestine (3 Hours)
This travel course examines the development of Judaism and Christianity under the Roman Empire and Hellenistic Culture. It provides a historical introduction to the period from the Maccabean Revolt through the Christianization of the region after Constantine. The course covers such topics as the Qumran community, Herod the Great, the Jewish revolts against Rome, the life of Jesus, and the rise of Christian holy places. It includes visits to locations such as Qumran and the Dead Sea, the Old City of Jerusalem, Sepphoris, Caesarea Maritima, Panias, Masada, and Herodium. Area Two: World's Religious Traditions. Offered infrequently.
Curriculum: EL,HC,HU

RELS 247 - Jewish and Christian Identities in Today's Israel/Palestine (3 Hours)
This travel course examines the existence of Jews and Christians in today's Israel/Palestine, focusing on the complexity of these groups. It provides a historical introduction to the region from the mid-19th century to the present. The course covers such topics as Jewish Messianism, Ultra-Orthodox Judaism, Judaism and conversion, women and gender, the land as a symbol in Jewish identity, the relationship of the Holocaust to Jewish/Israeli identity, Christian apocalyptic speculation, Palestinian Christianity, Christian diversity in Jerusalem, and Christian Israelis. It also includes discussions with a variety of Israeli and Palestinian thinkers and activists and features visits to locations such as Bethlehem, Jerusalem, Nazareth, Lake Kinneret, Masada, Yad Vashem, Mt. Herzl, and Old Jaffa/Tel Aviv. Area Two: World's Religious Traditions. Offered infrequently.
Curriculum: EL,NW

RELS 248 - Religions of Japan:Land of Kami, Land of Buddhas (3 Hours)
This course travels to Japan and provides a historical and cultural exploration of Japanese religious ideas and practices. Though the main focus will be on the religious tradition of Shinto and the many forms of Buddhism in Japan, the course will also consider the influence and impact of folk religion, Confucianism, Daoism, Christianity, and the wide array of new religious movements that have emerged in recent history. A particular focus of the course will be on the manner in which religion has so profoundly shaped multiple aspects of Japanese life, including the arts, politics, popular culture, and views of the natural environment. Area Two: The World's Religious Traditions.
Curriculum: EL,GE,HU,NW

RELS 251 - The Holocaust (3 Hours)
A study of the impact of the Holocaust upon individuals and groups as evidenced in writings, films, and works of art. The course begins with a historical study, then examines various forms of Holocaust literature produced by survivors of the Holocaust and by its perpetrators, victims, resisters, and bystanders. These works include eyewitness accounts, fiction, poetry, diaries, tales, oral histories, visual arts, music, and videos. We will also learn from the work of Holocaust scholars. Throughout the course we will give attention to religion's role in the Holocaust and ask about the Holocaust's continuing significance for both personal and social ethics and religious faith and practice. Area Three: Religion and Culture. Offered every two or three years.
Curriculum: HC,HU

RELS 254 - Religion in America (3 Hours)
A study of the development and significance of religion in the United States of America, from the colonial period to the present. Consideration will be given to the beliefs, practices, and interactions of religious traditions in the United States and how these affected the broader society and were in turn influenced by it. Students will gain an understanding of the role of religion and its importance for American life and thought. Area Three: Religion and Culture. Offered every two or three years.
Curriculum: CL,HU

RELS 258 - African-American Religion (3 Hours)
A study of African-American religious beliefs and practices from the colonial period to the present. This course examines the religious life and experiences of African-American individuals and groups. Situated within the larger context of religion in America and the dominant religious traditions of the broader society, African-American religion developed out of a combination of European Christianity and elements of African indigenous religions into the "invisible institution" of the antebellum South and later blossomed into a variety of new Christian denominations as well as Islamic and other religious traditions. Students will learn ways in which African-American religion drew from, contributed to, and challenged aspects of dominant religious traditions in the U.S. and how it holds a unique and important place in American religious, social, and cultural history. Area Three: Religion and Culture. Offered alternate years.
Curriculum: DI,HC,HU

RELS 260 - Religions and the Natural Environment (3 Hours)
This course will introduce students to the historical and contemporary relations between multiple religious traditions and the natural environment. Particular emphasis will be placed on Native American traditions, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Christianity. Students will examine scholarly works on the history, texts, rituals, and activism of religious traditions, as well as engage with sacred texts and creative works on the subject. In addition, students will explore a variety of contemporary perspectives from within new religious movements as well as secular environmental movements that frequently perpetuate and/or appropriate religious views of the natural environment. Area Three: Religion and Culture. Offered every two or three years.
Curriculum: HC,HU,NW

RELS 262 - Religion and Science (3 Hours)
An introduction to religion and science and the relationship between them. We will examine some of the most important perspectives, events, discoveries, theories, and texts that influenced religion, science, and the broader societies in which they developed along with changing perceptions of connections between them. Topics include a survey of the history of the relationship between religion and science, major debates and turning points in that relationship, and contemporary issues. While Christianity and science in Europe and America are the primary areas of study, we will also consider the relationship between science and other religions. Offered every two or three years. Area Three: Religion and Culture.
Curriculum: HC,HU

RELS 271 - Women and Religion (3 Hours)
This course offers both historical and contemporary perspectives on the situation of women in a variety of religious traditions throughout the world. The course provides a broad survey of religions, including Eastern World Religions (such as Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism, Daoism, and Shinto), Western World Religions (such as Judaism, Christianity, and Islam), and Indigenous Traditions (such as Australian, African, and Native American). In addition, the class examines the significant impact of feminist critique in the study of religion, the recent emergence of goddess-centered religions in the West, and the development of ecofeminist theologies and spirituality. Area Three: Religion and Culture. Offered every two or three years.
Curriculum: GE,HU,NW

RELS 274 - Women and Christianity (3 Hours)
A study of women in the Christian tradition, from biblical times to the present. We will examine some of the many ways women have been understood, interpreted, and portrayed throughout the history of the Christian faith and within various Christian churches, denominations, sects, and movements. Topics include biblical images of women, women in the early churches, women in medieval Christianity, and women in monastic orders. The roles of women in the Reformation, American Colonies, and organizations for mission and reform will also be studied, as well as changing conceptions of women and ordained ministry. Area Three: Religion and Culture. Offered every two or three years.
Curriculum: HC,HU

RELS 275 - Liberation Theology (3 Hours)
An examination of the development and expression of liberation theology through the study of representative writings emerging from current liberation movements (Black, feminist, Latin American); theological and ethical resources on which they draw; the delineation of unresolved problems such as the liberation of oppressors and viable forms of political and social transformation. Area Three: Religion and Culture. Offered every three years.
Curriculum: HC,HU

RELS 311 - Prophecy in Ancient Israel (3 Hours)
This course examines the phenomenon of prophecy, particularly in the ways it was manifested in ancient Israel. Attention will be given to the sociological and political dimensions of prophecy, as well as its psychology, ethics, theology, understanding of gender, and rhetorical function as literature. Area One: Biblical Studies. Offered every three years.
Prerequisite(s): One previous RELS course

Curriculum: HC,HU,NW,WA

RELS 321 - Religion and Literature (3 Hours)
This course relates major themes in literary works from different times and a range of sources with the concerns of religion. Emphasis will be placed upon how writers, in different cultural and religious contexts, have struggled with the relevance and applicability of traditional religious ideas and practices in the modern world. Students who have received credit for RELS352 may not receive credit for RELS321. Area Three: Religion and Culture.
Prerequisite(s): One previous RELS course

Curriculum: GE,HU,NW

RELS 324 - Contemporary American Religion (3 Hours)
A study of religion in the United States from the mid-20th century to the present. We focus on continuities and changes in mainline Protestantism and Catholicism, the lasting significance of Judaism, the increasing importance of Hinduism, Buddhism, and Islam, the flourishing of indigenous religions, and the rise of New Religious Movements. We also examine the interplay of religion with politics, law, race, gender, science, social issues, and American culture. Area Three: Religion and Culture. Offered every two or three years.
Prerequisite(s): one previous RELS course

Curriculum: CL,HU

RELS 381 - Special Topics (3 Hours)
These courses focus on areas of religious studies not specifically covered in the general curriculum and are designed to meet the needs of advanced students.

RELS 401 - Religious Studies Capstone (3 Hours)
A culminating experience in which a religious studies major integrates, extends, and applies knowledge and skills from the student's general education and major programs, drawing especially on terms, concepts, and methods associated with religious studies. Students will analyze and discuss readings selected from the three areas of emphasis within the major. Outside speakers will discuss career and graduate school options. Should be taken in a student's final year at the college. Offered spring term.
Prerequisite(s): Senior status and EDUC minor or Junior status and permission or RELS minor and permission

Curriculum: CS

RELS 450 - Internship in Religious Studies (Unpaid) (3 Hours)
Students will have opportunity to gain practical experience in the application of their learning in religious studies to actual situations through a field placement with area churches, church-related agencies, and organizations whose concerns focus upon social/ethical/religious issues. Application required; see Internship Program. A special fee ($200) is charged for this course.
Curriculum: EL

RELS 481 - Special Topics (3 Hours)
Designed to meet the needs and interests of advanced students. Topics will vary but may include an intensive study and interpretation of figures and movements in religion not covered in the general curriculum.

RELS 482 - Special Topics (3 Hours)
Designed to meet the needs and interests of advanced students. Topics will vary but may include an intensive study and interpretation of figures and movements in religion not covered in the general curriculum.

RELS 491 - Independent Study (3 Hours)
An independent study under the guidance of a member of the department. At least a 3.25 cumulative GPA and approval by the curriculum committee are required.
Curriculum: EL

RELS 492 - Independent Study (3 Hours)
An independent study under the guidance of a member of the department. At least a 3.25 cumulative GPA and approval by the curriculum committee are required.
Curriculum: EL

RELS 496 - Senior Project (3 Hours)
Senior majors may select an area of religious studies in which they will undertake intensive and independent research. Student earns a total of six hours for the full senior project experience (496, 497, and 498).
Curriculum: EL

RELS 497 - Senior Project (3 Hours)
Senior majors may select an area of religious studies in which they will undertake intensive and independent research. Student earns a total of six hours for the full senior project experience (496, 497, and 498).
Curriculum: EL

RELS 498 - Senior Project (3 Hours)
Senior majors may select an area of religious studies in which they will undertake intensive and independent research. Student earns a total of six hours for the full senior project experience (496, 497, and 498).
Curriculum: EL