

Religious Studies

MAJOR

PROFESSOR: Darla Schumm (John P. Wheeler Professor of Religious Studies; coordinator, religious studies)

AFFILIATED FACULTY: James Patrick Downey (philosophy), Michael E. Gettings (philosophy)

VISITING LECTURER: Kelly Derrick (adjunct)

VISITING ASSISTANT PROFESSORS: Ashleigh Breske, Marwood Larson-Harris

The religious studies major allows students to engage religious issues with other disciplines in the Global Politics and Societies (GPS) department: International Studies, Political Science, and Sociology. The shape of the religion major offers critical understandings of religion as community and individual enterprise, especially as religion relates to other human endeavors in GPS and other allied fields. Its focus is in the world's major religions, their rituals, beliefs, texts, and ethical systems, as well as the various social, political, and cultural contexts that shape, and are in turn shaped by, religious communities and beliefs.

The religious studies major provides excellent training in cultural literacy. It offers a broad background for graduate school in religious studies, ministerial studies, international studies, or programs in other allied fields. Its broadest appeal will be to those who wish to understand religious community and spirituality in their incarnations across many disciplines and cultures.

REQUIREMENTS FOR A MAJOR IN RELIGIOUS STUDIES:

11 courses (42 credits)

CORE COURSES:

- REL 126: Introduction to Religion in a Global Context (4)
- Two of the following:
 - REL 212: Christian Traditions (4)
 - REL 217: Islamic Traditions (4)
 - REL 218: Buddhist Traditions (4)
 - REL 219: Jewish Traditions (4)
- REL 340: Theories of Religion (4)
- GPS 216: Research Methods in Social Sciences (4)
- GPS 470: Senior Seminar (2)
- GPS 480: Senior Thesis (4) or an Internship (4)

ELECTIVE COURSES:

- Two additional 200 or 300 level Religious Studies courses (8)
- Two courses from one of the other GPS programs of study (International Studies, Political Science, Sociology), one at the 100-level and one at the 200 or 300 level (8)

COURSES IN RELIGIOUS STUDIES:

REL 117: INTRODUCTION TO THE HEBREW BIBLE (4)

Derrick

A Biblical study of the identity, faith, and history of Israel through a survey of drama, story, and event. This course broadly samples the law, prophets, and writings, in view of histories of interpretation, ritual, practices, and symbol systems. In addition, the course will provide an introduction to methods of exegesis, and to historical and literary criticism. Open to first-year students. No prerequisite. Offered Term 2. (*f, w, PRE*)

REL 118: INTRODUCTION TO THE NEW TESTAMENT (4)

Derrick

A survey of the early Christian writings and their interpretation. This course explores selected gospels, epistles, and writings in their historical context. Attention is paid to the development of historical Christian identity and community, liturgical practices and symbols, major themes, as well as to the history of interpretation of New Testament texts. The course also provides an introduction to exegesis, and to historical and literary criticism. Open to first-year students. No prerequisite. Not offered in 2020-21. (*f, w, x, DIV, PRE*)

REL 126: INTRODUCTION TO RELIGION IN A GLOBAL CONTEXT (4)

Schumm

Does religion matter? A brief scan of world events tells us that it does. This course introduces students to the study of religion in its cultural and historical contexts. It aims to familiarize students with the multi-faceted role of religion in the world including examination of social, economic, historical, political, and ethical factors. Open to first-year students. No prerequisite. Offered Term 1. (*f, w, x, GLO*)

REL 130: JESUS AND MARY MAGDALENE IN LITERATURE AND FILM (4)**Schumm**

The figures of Jesus of Nazareth and Mary Magdalene have captured the imagination of artists, writers, and filmmakers. Because the gospel accounts differ from one another and leave many questions unanswered regarding these two figures, the subsequent portrayals of them vary widely. This course will explore some of these portrayals in modern literature and film, sampling such artists as Paul Park, Denys Arcand, and Pier Paolo Pasolini. Open to first-year students. Offered Term 2. (*w, x, MOD*)

REL 140: DISABILITY, RELIGION AND ETHICS (4)**Schumm**

Religious teachings and practices help to establish cultural standards for what is deemed “normal” human physical and mental behavior and to establish a moral order for the healthy body and mind. Religion also plays an important role in determining how persons with disabilities are treated or mistreated in a given historical cultural context. Thus, this class will critically examine how religions represent, theologize, theorize, and respond to disability. Open to first-year students. Not offered in 2020-21. (*DIV*)

REL 212: CHRISTIAN TRADITIONS (4)**Derrick**

The many sects of Christianity have repeatedly attempted to reinterpret the origins of the tradition in ways which provide a new or “reformed” framework for a community. The course examines not only the history of early Christianity, but also a selection of such reinterpretations and of Christians’ responses to other cultures with whom they coexist. Prerequisite: REL 117, or REL 118 recommended. Not offered in 2020-21. (*o, DIV, MOD*)

REL 215: WOMEN IN JUDAISM, CHRISTIANITY, AND ISLAM (4)**Derrick**

This course involves a critical analysis of women, sex, and gender issues in the religious traditions of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. We examine the androcentric history of each monotheistic tradition. Although the principal focus of this course is not comparative in design, we discuss similarities and differences between the experiences of women in these religions in the modern contexts. Also listed as GWS 216. No prerequisite. Open to first-year students. Not offered in 2020-21. (*DIV, MOD*)

REL 217: ISLAMIC TRADITIONS (4)**Schumm**

The early community of Muslims at Medina is explicitly understood to be a model for the ideal Islamic polity. Struggles to define the relationship between religious and political leadership and community in these early years established problems and precedents that remain issues in Islam even today. The course examines the early community and follows some of these issues of Islamic self-identity into the present. Open to first-year students. Offered Term 2. (*o, GLO, PRE*)

REL 218: BUDDHIST TRADITIONS (4)**Schumm**

This class is both an introduction to Buddhism as well as an investigation of how Buddhist teachings, symbols, stories, doctrines, ethics, and practices inform human understanding and engagement with the environment and the natural world. Topics discussed in class fall into two primary categories: a basic introduction to Buddhism, and an exploration of Buddhism and ecology. Open to first-year students. Not offered in 2020-21. (*o, GLO, MOD*)

REL 219: JEWISH TRADITIONS (4)**Schumm**

Through the lens of the foundational communities in Palestine and the diaspora, we will view some of the basic issues in the definition of Jewish self-identity: exile and return, sacrifice and study, cultural assimilation, and the physical and spiritual “lands” of Israel. Prerequisite: REL 117 recommended. Not offered in 2020-21. (*o, DIV, MOD*)

REL 223: WOMEN IN BUDDHISM (4)**Schumm**

This course critically examines the role, status, and contributions of women throughout Buddhist history. Students examine the role women played in the formation of Buddhism and how significant texts, important teachings, and influential figures portray women. Students explore how modern female practitioners understand their contributions to the tradition and how the role of women differs within various branches of Buddhism. Also listed as GWS 223. Not offered in 2020-21. (*r, GLO*)

REL 241: SOCIOLOGY OF RELIGION (4)**Department**

This course analyzes religion as it relates to a range of social identities. We begin with a discussion of sociological theories of religion through which we will consider trends within religious practice, the purposes and effects of religion, and the intersection of religion and other social structures. The class will then consider these theories in empirical contexts. Also listed at SOC 241. Not offered in 2020-21. (*DIV*)

REL 250: SPECIAL TOPIC: CHINESE RELIGIONS (4)**Larson-Harris**

This course examines three Chinese religious traditions—Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism. We will read texts from these traditions such as the Analects of Confucius, the Tao te Ching, the Platform Sutra and many others, with special attention given to key concepts, problems in translation, and similarities to or differences from western concepts. We will also discover how these traditions resulted in unique literary forms by reading Taoist and Buddhist poetry. Offered Term 1.

REL 270: SACRED STORY: WORLD SCRIPTURES (4)**Derrick**

A survey of the major world religions through the voices of their sacred stories. We will consider how religious traditions understand and use their sacred texts – an exciting challenge since the meaning of these texts is not always clear. The course provides an opportunity to dig deeper into the texts, with the help of modern interpretation, to discover the richness of these religious writings and the faiths which inspired them. Open to first-years. No Prerequisite. Not offered in 2020-21. (f, w, x, PRE)

REL 272: PHILOSOPHY OF RELIGION (4)**Downey**

Also listed and described as PHIL 272. Not offered in 2020-21.

REL 281: RELIGION AND DISABILITY (4)**Schumm**

This course explores the powerful intersections between religion and disability in sacred texts, religious doctrine, popular culture, and lived experience. We will probe questions such as: What does it mean to be human? Why are some bodies deemed more worthy than others? How are ideas of normal and abnormal constructed and reinforced? Does religion promote or hinder disability justice? Also listed and described as GWS 281. Open to first-year students. Not offered in 2020-21. (w, x, MOD, DIV)

REL 290: INDEPENDENT STUDY (2 or 4)**Department**

Independent study conducted below the advanced level. Application must be made with faculty prior to registration. Offered any term.

REL 318: SEXUAL ETHICS (4)**Schumm**

What is “good” sex? How is sexual deviance determined and defined? How do constructions of sexuality differ across cultures? This class explores the intersections between sexuality, religion, and ethics. We will examine the roles race, class, and gender play in the construction and understanding of sexuality. Also listed as GWS 318. Prerequisite: junior standing. Not offered in 2020-21. (o, DIV)

REL 327: EARLY CHRISTIANITY (4)**Department**

Also listed and described as HIST 327. Prerequisite: sophomore standing or permission of the instructor. Not offered in 2020-21. (PRE)

REL 335: MILTON (4)**Pfeiffer**

An analysis of *Paradise Lost*. We will use close readings of the poem’s language, structure, and themes to understand Milton’s epic as a literary masterpiece; we will consider literary responses to the poem as a means of determining the epic’s cultural significance. Also listed as ENG 335. Prerequisite: junior standing or permission. Not offered in 2020-21. (w, x, o)

REL 340: THEORIES OF RELIGION (4)**Schumm**

This course examines the historical development and modern understanding of the academic study of religion. The focus of our inquiry will be the problems of methodology implicit in the study of religion. The course draws upon a variety of disciplines whose methods have built the secular study of religion, including anthropology, sociology, literary criticism, feminist theory, and ritual theory. We examine traditional as well as alternative methodological approaches, including perspectives that attend to issues of race, gender, and class. We will read and discuss concrete examples of how these various theories and methods are applied when studying the world’s major religious traditions. Prerequisite: two religion courses, one at the 200 level. Offered Term 1.

REL 350: SPECIAL TOPIC: RELIGIOUS FREEDOM AND GLOBAL POLITICS (4)**Breske**

This course will offer a comprehensive overview of the debates on secularism and the role of religion in the public sphere. Looking at specific case study examples, we will examine the relationship between religious discourses and political violence, political systems and multiculturalism models, theocratic states, and state responses to religious identity claims. Prerequisite: sophomore standing or permission. Also listed and described as POLS 350. Offered Term 1.

REL 350: SPECIAL TOPIC: RELIGION AND ECOLOGY (4)**Larsen-Harris**

Our current environmental problems have been caused not just by rampant industrialization but by our very notions of what nature is and our relationship to it. Some see the possibility of challenging our current ecological world views through an exploration of or a re-inspiration from the world's various religious and spiritual traditions. This course aims to discover how religious traditions have responded to the natural world through story, theology, and action. We will focus on Indigenous traditions, three Asian Religions (Taoism, Hinduism, and Buddhism) and two Western Traditions (Judaism and Christianity). We will explore how these diverse traditions offer both ancient and new perspectives on the ecological crisis and express the hope to reunite us with the earth. Topics will include animals, ecosystems, Climate Change, and sustainability, etc. Not open to first-year students. Also listed as ES 350. Offered Term 2.

REL 362: SPIRITUAL ACTIVISM (4)**Costa**

Also listed and described as GWS 362. Prerequisite: sophomore standing or permission. Offered Term 1. (DIV)

REL 390: INDEPENDENT STUDY (2 or 4)**Department**

Independent study conducted at the advanced level. Application must be made with faculty prior to registration. Offered both terms.

REL 399: INTERNSHIP (4)**Department**

Application must be made with faculty prior to registration. May be proposed in any term.

REL 490: SENIOR HONORS THESIS (4, 4)**Department**

Senior religious studies majors with strong academic records may apply to work for honors recognition by presenting a thesis proposal to the faculty of the department. This project is completed over Fall, Short, and Spring Terms. Prerequisite: senior religious studies major. Application with faculty must be made prior to registration.