

Religious Studies

MAJOR

PROFESSOR: Darla Schumm (coordinator, religious studies)

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

ASSISTANT PROFESSOR: Ashleigh Breske

VISITING ASSISTANT PROFESSOR: 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 on 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:

10 courses (40 credits)

CORE COURSES:

- REL 126: Introduction to Religion in a Global Context (4)
- Two of the following:
 - REL 212: Christian Traditions (4)
 - REL 217: Islam and the West (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 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 126: INTRODUCTION TO RELIGION IN A GLOBAL CONTEXT (4)

Department

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. Not offered in 2024-25. (*w, x, MOD*)

REL 201: INTRODUCTION TO THE HEBREW BIBLE (4)

Department

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 1. (*f, w, PRE*)

REL 202: INTRODUCTION TO THE NEW TESTAMENT (4)

Department

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. Offered Term 2. (*f, w, x, DIV, PRE*)

REL 212: CHRISTIAN TRADITIONS (4)

Department

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. Offered Term 1. (*o, DIV, MOD*)

REL 215: SILENCED? MARGINALIZED VOICES IN JUDAISM, CHRISTIANITY, AND ISLAM (4)

Department

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 and described as GWS 216. No prerequisite. Open to first-year students. Not offered in 2024-25. (*DIV, MOD*)

REL 217: ISLAM AND THE WEST (4)

Department

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 2024-25. (*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 2024-25. (*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 and described as GWS 223. Not offered in 2024-25. (*r, GLO*)

REL 235: COMPASSION, COMMUNITY, HOPE: ECONOMIC JUSTICE IN THE BIBLE (4)

Department

Grounded in the biblical theme of justice, this course considers the importance of the biblical texts as they relate to wealth and poverty. We examine a broad range of economic issues and how they are addressed in scripture. Based upon readings of primary texts from the Bible, the course explores the potential contributions and limitations of scripture to contemporary socio-ethical dialogue. No prerequisite; Open to first-year students. Not offered in 2024-25. (*f, w, x, DIV*)

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 and described as SOC 241. Not offered in 2024-25. (*DIV*)

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

This course examines three Chinese religious and philosophical traditions—Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism. We will read philosophical 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 philosophies. We will also discover how these traditions resulted in unique literary forms by reading Taoist and Buddhist poetry. Open to first-year students. Offered Term 2.

REL 250: 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 (Hinduism, Buddhism, and Shintoism) 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. Open to first-year students. Offered Term 2.

REL 250: SPECIAL TOPIC: NATIVE AMERICAN RELIGIONS (4)**Larsen-Harris**

Long before Jamestown was founded, Native Americans practiced elaborate religious traditions—and they continue to do so today. This course will explore the rich diversity of practices that existed before first contact and those that evolved when Christianity began to spread. We will read Native American myths and stories from around the continent and also research individual tribal traditions. We will seek to understand ancient native rituals such as the Sun Dance as well as those movements that arose in response to Christianity such as the peyote cult and Ghost Dance. The course's methodologies include the following: a historical perspective from pre-contact to the modern era; a narrative approach to story cycles at the genre, tribal, and regional level; an anthropological analysis of ritual; finally, a biographical approach will reveal how the many dimensions of Native American religion come together in the life of significant practitioners. Open to first-year students. Offered Term 2.

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

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. Offered Term 2. (f, w, x, PRE)

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

Also listed and described as PHIL 272. Offered Term 1.

REL 281: SINNERS, SAINTS, AND MISFITS: 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 2024-25. (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 and described as GWS 318. Prerequisite: junior standing. Offered Term 1. (o, DIV)

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 and described as ENG 335. Prerequisite: junior standing or permission. Offered Term 2. (w, x, o)

REL 340: THEORIES OF RELIGION (4)

Department

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. Not offered in 2024-25..

REL 362: SPIRITUAL ACTIVISM (4)

Costa

Also listed and described as GWS 362. Prerequisite: sophomore standing or permission. Not offered in 2024-25. (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.