

SPRING 2021 RELIGIOUS STUDIES COURSE BROCHURE

All Religious Studies courses 101-298 satisfy General Education Humanities requirements. There is both a major and minor in Religious Studies for those with a serious interest in the study of religion. All students who have earned 45 credits or more must declare a major. If you would like to learn more about the Religious Studies major, please speak with your Religious Studies professor or with the Chair, Dr. Elijah Siegler (sieglere@cofc.edu).

REQUIREMENTS FOR THE MAJOR IN RELIGIOUS STUDIES: 34 semester hours, that must include:

1. Choose one of the following courses: RELS 101, 103, 105, 106, 115, 117, 118, 120, or 185
 2. RELS 210: Theories in the Study of Religions (only taught in spring semester)
 3. One of the Western Abrahamic religions: RELS 223 (Ancient Near East), 225 (Judaism), 230 (Christianity), or 235 (Islam)
 4. One of the Asian religions: RELS 240 (Buddhism), 245 (Hinduism), 247 (Daoism), or 248 (Religions of China & Japan)
 5. One of the American religions: RELS 250 (American Religions), 253 (Religions of Charleston), 260 (Native American Religions), 270 (African American Religions)
 6. One of the Sacred Texts: RELS 201 (Hebrew Bible/Old Testament), 202 (New Testament), 205 (Asian Sacred Texts) or 310* (Sacred Texts) --* if taken as a sacred text course, 2 more 300 level courses are needed
 7. RELS 450: Senior Seminar (only taught in fall semester)
 8. RELS 451: Capstone Colloquium (1 credit hour only taught in spring semester)
 9. One additional course at the 200-level or above
 10. Two additional courses at the 300-level or above
 11. Additional elective: 1 additional course
- **With the approval of the Chair of Religious Studies, one course (200 level or above) in a related discipline may be substituted for one of the courses listed under 9 or 10 above.**

REQUIREMENTS FOR THE MINOR IN RELIGIOUS STUDIES: 18 semester hours which must include:

1. RELS 101 or 103 or 105 or 106
2. One of: RELS 223, 225, 230, 235, 240, 245, 247, 248, 250, 253, 260 or 270
3. One of: RELS 201, 202, 205 or 310 (note: 310 cannot be used to satisfy both the sacred text and 300 level course requirements)
4. One additional course at the 300-level or above
5. Two additional courses in Religious Studies.

RELS COURSE OFFERINGS FOR SPRING 2021

Course	CRN	Title	Meeting Days	Meeting Times	Instructor
RELS101.02	21085	Approaches to Religion: Pilgrimage to Sacred Places in North America and to Hindu India	MW	1400-1515	Bjerken
RELS101.04	21927	Approaches to Religion: Sacred Space	MWF	1100-1150	Keegan
RELS101.05	21928	Approaches to Religion: Sacred Space	MWF	1200-1250	Keegan
RELS105.01	20665	Intro to World Religions	MWF	0900-0950	Lowe
RELS105.02	20666	Intro to World Religions	MWF	1000-1050	Lowe
RELS105.03	20667	Intro to World Religions: ONLINE	TR	925-1040	Fisher
RELS105.04	21414	Intro to World Religions: ONLINE	TR	1215-1330	Fisher
RELS115.01	21702	Religion and Society: Black Religion & Black Nationalism from Slave Rebellions to Black Lives Matter	TR	1215-1330	Cressler
RELS117.01	23302	Premodern History of Religions	MW	1600-1515	Huddlestun
RELS117.02	23303	Premodern History of Religions	TR	1050-1205	Huddlestun
RELS201.01	23301	Hebrew Bible: History & Interpretation	TR	1340-1455	Huddlestun
RELS210.01	20996	Theories in the Study of Religions	TR	0925-1040	Cressler
RELS235.01	23309	The Islamic Tradition	MW	1400-1515	Davidson
RELS250.01	21932	Religion in America: ONLINE	MWF	1100-1150	Siegler
RELS298.01	23310	Special Topics: Illusion and Reality in Asian Religions	TR	1215-1330	Bjerken
RELS298.02	23311	Special Topics: Religion, Ethics, and Health Care	TR	1505-1620	Fisher
RELS305.01	23304	Topics in Indigenous Religions: Indigenous Ecological Knowledge	MW	1600-1715	Keegan
RELS451.01	21087	Capstone Colloquium: ONLINE	M	1300-1350	Siegler
FYSE134		Finding Your Way: The Ancient Chinese Secret to Happiness	MWF	0900-0950	Siegler
HONS240.01	22976	Honors Colloquium on Value & Tradition in Asian Religions	TR	0925-1040	Bjerken
HONS250.04	22981	Black Religion & Black Nationalism from Slave Rebellions to Black Lives Matter	TR	1340-1455	Cressler

RELIGIOUS STUDIES SPRING 2021 COURSE DESCRIPTIONS

RELS 101.02 **Approaches to Religion:** **Prof. Bjerken**
Pilgrimage to Sacred Places in North America and to Hindu India
MW **1400-1515**

This course introduces students to American Christianity and Indian Hinduism by focusing on their distinctive understandings of sacred place and pilgrimage. We begin by reading the studies of two “Road Scholars” who seek to understand Christianity and New Age religions in the US while they undertake a common American ritual: the road trip. After visiting many fascinating roadside religious attractions in the US, we travel to the ancient and living city of Varanasi in India. This sacred city will serve as a lens through which the worldview of Hindu pilgrims comes into focus. We will rely on texts that combine travel narrative and religious study, and documentary films to gain insight into the rituals, sacred stories, and travels and travails of the pilgrims.

RELS 101.04/05 **Approaches to Religion: Sacred Space** **Prof. Keegan**
MWF **1100-1150 and 1200-1250**

For many religious traditions, religious activity is linked to specific places that have historical, ritual, or mythical significance. These “sacred spaces” may be found in the natural world, the built environment, or even the human body. This course is designed to introduce you to the academic study of religion and to some of the central questions that animate the study of sacred space. We will explore and evaluate case studies of sacred space through diverse traditions, including Indigenous landscapes, Hindu temples, American Christian churches, Muslim pilgrimage sites, and our own Holy City. We will evaluate how religion relates to the social, political and economic contexts in which it is embedded—not merely as something people think or believe, but as something people do.

RELS 105.01/02 **Introduction to World Religions** **Prof. Lowe**
MWF **900-950 and 1000-1050**

This course will explore a variety of human cultural traditions from around the world that are traditionally considered “World Religions.” In addition to learning about important practices, texts, objects, and beliefs, the course will always be paying attention to the word “religion” and the history of the idea of “world religions.” The course will, therefore, be both historical and anthropological, looking at fascinating moments of the past and exploring present practices and politics of religion. Using lecture and discussion, film and music, the course will explore both the mundane and the extraordinary as integral pieces of human religious experience.

RELS 105.03/04 **Introduction to World Religions** **Prof. Fisher**
TR **925-1040 and 1215-1330 (ONLINE)**

This course is designed to introduce students to five of the world’s major religious traditions, Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, as well the role that religion plays in a secular society like the United States. In our discussions we will briefly examine the historical development of each tradition and pay special attention to the various concepts of divinity as well as the sacred texts, rites, rituals, myths, and narratives that are considered essential to qualifying each as a “lived” religious tradition. There is no prerequisite for this class.

RELS 115.01 **Religion and Society: Black Religion & Black Nationalism** **Prof. Cressler**
TR **1215-1330**
from Slave Rebellions to Black Lives Matter

This course introduces students to the religious ideas and practices from across the African diaspora that gave rise to the political tradition now known as “Black nationalism.” While the tradition is often imagined to be secular (even anti-religious), this course explores the deep religious roots of Black struggles to create a new nation—from slave rebellions to the Black Power revolution to our contemporary Black Lives Matter movement. The course will survey Black religion and Black nationalism across the past four centuries. Students will also hone the analytical tools to think critically about “nation,” “race,” and “religion” as modern categories.

RELS 117.01/02 **Premodern History of Religions**
MW and TR **1600-1715 and 1050-1205**

Prof. Huddlestun

In this course we survey the history and development of the religious beliefs, practices, and institutions of those peoples of the ancient Near East (including Egyptians, Sumerians, Babylonians, Assyrians, Hittites, Canaanites, and Israelites). Our survey covers a wide range of material, both geographically and chronologically, spanning a period of nearly 3,000 years, from the emergence of writing (ca. 3100 BCE) down to the Hellenistic and Roman periods. As we consider earlier religious ideas and rituals from Mesopotamia, Egypt, and the Levant – situating these in their larger socio-political and intellectual contexts – students will develop an awareness of patterns of historical development and influence in relation to religion in ancient Israel (as evident in the biblical text and relevant archaeological evidence). The course relies extensively on textual and iconographic primary sources. Through these, students acquire the necessary critical and analytic tools to read and interpret these sources, especially in their wider historical and political contexts. Given the wealth of potential topics, we can delve into only a select few, including the gods in their temples (the cult statue as the image of the god), the origins of the gods and the cosmos, the problem of suffering with respect to the gods and how to account for this, the historical development of monotheism, concepts of death and afterlife, prophets/prophecy and divinatory techniques to ascertain the will of the gods, and incantations to ward off potential evil. While one does find differences among peoples of this region, over the course of the term we will begin to see some of the broader similarities that allow one to speak tentatively of a larger common ancient Near Eastern religious world view – a world view that was highly influential in shaping much of Jewish, Christian, and Islamic thought.

RELS 201.01 **Hebrew Bible: History & Interpretation**
TR **1340-1455**

Prof. Huddlestun

In this course, the student is introduced to the academic study of the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament, examining issues of its composition, historical development, and interpretation (ancient and modern). Particular genres or types of biblical literature will be considered in light of their wider ancient Near Eastern context (creation and cosmos, legal material, wisdom of the sages, etc.). In reading and analyzing selected portions of the Hebrew scripture, students will be exposed to various historical-critical, literary, and archaeological interpretations of the text. Topics covered include the covenant theme in Genesis and beyond, kingship in ancient Israel, the exodus event (history and archaeology), the role of prophets and the nature of ancient Israelite prophecy, the Davidic messiah-king and messianic expectation, biblical wisdom literature, and love poetry.

RELS 210.01 **Theories in the Study of Religions**
TR **925-1040**

Prof. Cressler

What is religion? Where does it come from? Is it a universal human phenomenon? Does one have to be religious to study religion? Does one have to be critical of religion to study religion? Can we compare religions across space and time? If so, how? This course introduces students to theories in the study of religion and surveys debates that have defined the discipline. In other words, rather than focusing on one or more religions (i.e. Christianity, Buddhism, Sikhism, etc.), this course focuses on the category of "religion" itself. Students will approach the subject from historical, political, psychological, sociological, phenomenological, and postcolonial perspectives. By the end of the semester, students will craft their own answers to those questions, and more!

RELS 235.01 **The Islamic Tradition**
MW **1400-1515**

Prof. Davidson

This course surveys the most salient features of Islamic thought and societies. It examines the histories, theologies and legal traditions of Islamic societies from the birth of the Muslim community in the seventh century to the twenty-first century. In geography it covers the entirety of the Muslim majority world from Morocco to Malaysia and beyond. This exploration draws on a variety of primary sources in translation and will expose students to some of the most important religious texts produced by Muslim societies.

RELS 250.01 **Religion in America**
MWF **1100-1150 (ONLINE)**

Prof. Siegler

This course covers American religious history from the sixteenth century until today, including the religions of Native Americans, Puritans, Southern enslaved peoples and slave-owners, evangelicals, Jews, Catholics, Mormons, New Agers and many others. Students will learn how religion in America intersects with politics, culture and race. Students will have the opportunity to learn about the religions of the Charleston area and to explore their families' religious history. This course will be conducted on Zoom and feature tours of religious sites in the U.S. South, and conversations with experts on U.S. Southern religion.

RELS 298.01 **Special Topics in Religious Studies:** **Prof. Bjerken**
TR **Illusion and Reality in Asian Religions**
1215-1330

This course will explore the visions, values, and practices that inspire the religious traditions of Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism, Daoism and Christianity practiced in South and East Asia. The course is designed around major themes, including discerning between illusion and reality; meditation and the diversity of religious experiences; pilgrimage and spiritual quests; death, the afterlife, and ancestor worship; religion, gender and sexuality; monasticism and the hermit's life; the transformation of foreign traditions to fit native worldviews; and the effects of globalization on religions today. The course will follow an easterly route, beginning in India and moving to China and Japan, at the same time as we move from ancient times down to the present day. We begin with the ancient Indian civilization that appeared some 3,000 years ago and end with religious debates over the topics of abortion and organ transplant in Japan today. The course will satisfy the Asian tradition requirement for the RELS major & minor.

RELS 298.02 **Special Topics in Religious Studies:** **Prof. Fisher**
TR **Religion, Ethics, and Health Care**
1505-1620

This course is designed to examine the ethical principles that commonly guide health care decisions in a liberal, pluralistic society. In our discussions, we will critically analyze a variety of theoretical frameworks offered by contemporary ethicists, and explore debates about the implications of these principles within Protestant, Catholic, Jewish, and humanistic traditions. Topics and case studies include: terminating life-sustaining treatment; suicide and assisted suicide; abortion and maternal-fetal relations; reproductive technologies (including cloning, the use of embryos in Stem Cell Research, and applied human genetics/genomics); using human subjects in research; justice and access to health care; and public health. There is no prerequisite for this class.

RELS 305.01 **Topics in Indigenous Religions: Indigenous Ecological Knowledge** **Prof. Keegan**
MW **1600-1715**

This course explores the diverse ways of understanding and responding to the world that emerge from Indigenous cultures. Indigenous Ecological Knowledge (IEK) refers to the Indigenous or Native bodies of knowledge related to human beliefs, practices and experiences embedded in specific locations. With a focus on Native North America, this course will introduce you to Indigenous culture and religion as unique forms of knowledge. We will explore environmental justice movements, sacred lands and medicines, climate change adaptation, religious resiliency, food sovereignty, and ecological restoration.

RELS 451.01 **Capstone Colloquium** **Prof. Siegler**
M **1300-1350 (ONLINE)**

This required one-credit course is designed to provide a capstone experience for majors in Religious Studies, and will feature visits from recent RELS alumni as guest speakers. The Colloquium is not another course on the subject of religion, but a "meta-course" that will provide RELS students with an opportunity to reflect on the cumulative achievement of their studies and consider how they might apply their knowledge and skills in their future professional and personal lives. (We meet for one hour each week live on Zoom.)

FYSE 134 **Finding Your Way: The Ancient Chinese Secret to Happiness** **Prof. Siegler**
MWF **900-950**

What is the best way to live a good life? What can we do to create a better society? And what should we concretely do to live in a fuller and more inspiring way? Questions such as these were at the heart of philosophical debates in China. The answers that classical Chinese thinkers developed in response to these questions are among the most powerful in human history. These ancient ideas can guide us towards real happiness. The course will focus on short readings from the ancient texts themselves (in translation) and on short writing assignments that promote observation and self-reflection. No previous knowledge or experience assumed!

HONS 240.01

**Honors Colloquium on Value & Tradition
in Asian Religions**

Prof. Bjerken

TR

0925-1040

This course will explore the visions, values, and practices that inspire the religious traditions of Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism, Daoism and Christianity practiced in South and East Asia. The course is designed around major themes, including discerning between illusion and reality; meditation and the diversity of religious experiences; pilgrimage and spiritual quests; death, the afterlife, and ancestor worship; religion, gender and sexuality; monasticism and the hermit's life; the transformation of foreign traditions to fit native worldviews; and the effects of globalization on religions today. The course will follow an easterly route, beginning in India and moving to China and Japan, at the same time as we move from ancient times down to the present day. We begin with the ancient Indian civilization that appeared some 3,000 years ago and end with religious debates over the topics of abortion and organ transplant in Japan today.

HONS 250.04

**Black Religion & Black Nationalism
from Slave Rebellions to Black Lives Matter**

Prof. Cressler

TR

1340-1455

This course introduces students to the religious ideas and practices from across the African diaspora that gave rise to the political tradition now known as "Black nationalism." While the tradition is often imagined to be secular (even anti-religious), this course explores the deep religious roots of Black struggles to create a new nation—from slave rebellions to the Black Power revolution to our contemporary Black Lives Matter movement. The course will survey Black religion and Black nationalism across the past four centuries. Students will also hone the analytical tools to think critically about "nation," "race," and "religion" as modern categories.