

SPRING 2024 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 the department chair, Dr. Zeff Bjerken (bjerken@cofc.edu).

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

1. Choose one of the following introductory-level 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 Abrahamic/Near Eastern 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 following **methodology** courses: RELS 201 (Hebrew Bible/Old Testament), 202 (New Testament), 205 (Sacred Texts of the East), 253 (Religions of Charleston), 270 (African American Religions), 280 (Religion and Film), or 310 (Sacred Texts)
 7. RELS 450: Senior Seminar (only taught in fall semester)
 8. RELS 451: Capstone Colloquium (1 credit hour only; 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, one course (200 level or above) in a related discipline may be substituted for one of the courses listed above.**

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

1. One introductory level course: RELS 101, 103, 105, 106, 115, 117, 118, 120, 185
2. One additional religious tradition course: RELS 223, 225, 230, 235, 240, 245, 247, 248, 250, 253, 260 or 270
3. One additional methodology course: RELS 201, 202, 205, 253, 270, 280 or 310
4. One additional course at the 300-level or above
5. Two additional courses in Religious Studies.

Course	CRN	Title	Meeting Days	Meeting Times	Instructor
RELS101.01	21648	Approaches to Religion: Pilgrimage to Sacred Places in North America and Hindu India	MW	5:30-6:45	Bjerken
RELS101.02	20744	Approaches to Religion: Religion and Protest	MWF	12:00-12:50	Fisher
RELS103.01	23189	Death and the Afterlife (ONLINE SYNCHRONOUS)	MW	2:00-3:15	Fitzgerald
RELS103.02	23190	Death and the Afterlife (ONLINE SYNCHRONOUS)	MW	3:25-4:40	Fitzgerald
RELS105.01	20466	Intro to World Religions	MWF	10:00-10:50	Fisher
RELS105.02	20467	Intro to World Religions	TR	12:15-1:30	Lowe
RELS105.03	20468	Intro to World Religions	TR	1:40-2:55	Lowe
RELS105.04	20949	Intro to World Religions (ONLINE SYNCHRONOUS)	MWF	11:00-11:50	Fitzgerald
RELS105.05	21803	Intro to World Religions (ONLINE SYNCHRONOUS)	MWF	12:00-12:50	Fitzgerald
RELS115.01	23191	Religion and Society: Evangelicalism in America	MWF	10:00-10:50	Siegler
RELS115.02	23192	Religion and Society: Evangelicalism in America	MWF	11:00-11:50	Siegler
RELS117.01	21390	Premodern History of Religions in the Ancient Near East	MW	2:00-3:15	Huddlestun
RELS117.02	21391	Premodern History of Religions in the Ancient Near East	MW	4:00-5:15	Huddlestun
RELS205.01	23193	Sacred Texts of the East and Their Modern Meanings in the West	TR	10:50-12:05	Bjerken
RELS210.01	20674	Theories in the Study of Religions	TR	9:25-10:40	Lowe
RELS255.01	23312	Philosophy of Religion	MWF	10:00-10:50	Grantham
RELS260.01	23194	Native American Religions	TR	1:40-2:55	Keegan
RELS315.01	23195	New Religious Movements	MW	2:00-3:15	Siegler
RELS451.01	20746	Capstone Colloquium	M	12:00-12:50	Huddlestun
FYSU134.01	23073	First-Year Seminar on Environmental Storytelling: Religion, Race and Nature	TR	9:25-10:40	Keegan
FYSU134.02	23074	First-Year Seminar on Environmental Storytelling: Religion, Race and Nature	TR	10:50-12:05	Keegan
HONS175.01	23214	Honors Approaches to Religion: Religion and Protest	MWF	1:00-1:50	Fisher

RELIGIOUS STUDIES SPRING 2024 COURSE DESCRIPTIONS

RELS 101.01 **Approaches to Religion: Pilgrimage to Sacred Places** **Prof. Bjerken**
in North America and Hindu India
MW **5:30-6:45**

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 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 101.02 **Approaches to Religion: Religion and Protest** **Prof. Fisher**
MWF **12:00-12:50**

This course is designed to introduce students to the academic study of religion by exploring the complex relationships between Religion and Protest in the Buddhist, Jewish, and Christian traditions. It will do so in three ways: 1) by examining texts and events in which religious commitments and/or communities have inspired individuals and groups to challenge perceived social wrongs; 2) by considering significant critiques of the role of religion and faith in social justice efforts; and 3) by examining the role that religion plays in contemporary ecological and political discussions. Through thoughtful analysis and lively discussion, we will examine the extent to which religion is considered an aid or an obstacle to social justice.

RELS 103.01/02 **Death and the Afterlife (ONLINE)** **Prof. Fitzgerald**
MW **2:00-3:15 or 3:25-4:40**

This course will survey how multiple religious traditions, both eastern and western, understand death and the afterlife. Topics include the ritual treatment of the body, beliefs about the soul or consciousness, varying conceptions of survival after death (including reincarnation, resurrection, and divine judgment), the geography of the afterlife and experiential accounts of the afterlife. The course may explore mediumship and shamanic experience, past life memory, near death experience, and the paranormal.

RELS 105.01 **Introduction to World Religions** **Prof. Fisher**
MWF **10:00-10:50**

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 supposedly “secular” society like the United States. In our discussions we will briefly examine the historical developments of each tradition, and pay special attention to the myths, texts, rituals, and narratives that are considered essential to qualifying each as a “lived” religious tradition.

RELS 105.02/03 **Introduction to World Religions** **Prof. Lowe**
TR **12:15-1:30 and 1:40-2:55**

Human universals exist – we all experience hunger and pain, we all feel happiness and pleasure, and we all die. But, what about religion? Is there anything universal about what we call “religion”? Join us as we explore many examples from around the world that we regularly name as “religion,” and let’s find out together! In addition to learning about important practices, texts, objects, and beliefs, the course will also consider the political, economic, and social effects of these traditions. Using lecture and discussion, film and music, the course will explore both the mundane and the extraordinary as we examine the great variety of “world religions.”

RELS 105.04/05 **Introduction to World Religions (ONLINE)** **Prof. Fitzgerald**
MWF **11:00-11:50 or 12:00-12:50**

An introductory study of the origins, beliefs, and practices of the major religions of the world. In this course, students will encounter several different religions, many of which they are not nor have ever been a part of. While this class will cover “World Religions,” students will be challenged to ask what it means to be called a “World Religion.” Who is excluded from this category, and who is included? This course will use 1) a material religion approach, objects, artwork, ritual sites, sacred spaces 2) to explore how different religious traditions engage with materiality 3) to express their worldview, their history, and their ideas of what we call “Religion.”

RELS 115.01/02 **Religion and Society: Evangelicalism and America** **Prof. Siegler**
MWF **10:00-10:50 or 11:00-11:50**

How are Evangelical Christianity and American politics intertwined? This course answers this question from an interdisciplinary perspective. We begin by looking at the January 6, 2021 siege of the US Capitol as a religious event, and then look back to key moments in US history—from colonization to 19th century revivalism to the emergence of the “religious right” in the 1970s. We focus on ongoing debates where Evangelicalism and politics intersect, including over healthcare, gender roles, education (particularly science and history), and “religious freedom.” We will pay special attention to the role “White Christian Nationalism” plays in the 2024 election season, with our flexible syllabus allowing us to discuss current events.

RELS 117.01/02 **Premodern History of Religions in the Ancient Near East** **Prof. Huddleston**
MW **2:00-3:15 or 4:00-5:15**

A history of the religious beliefs, rituals, and institutions of those peoples of the Ancient Near Middle East (Egyptians, Babylonians, Assyrians, Canaanites, Israelites etc.), looking at the gods in their temples and temple rituals, mythological tales, magic and divination, concepts of death and afterlife (including the Egyptian Pyramid and Coffin texts), personal piety and religion, responses to evil and misfortune, holy war, and more.

RELS 205.01 **Sacred Texts of the East and their Modern Meanings in the West** **Prof. Bjerken**
TR **10:50-12:05**

This course will examine three religious classics in depth from India: the most famous Hindu text named *The Bhagavad Gita*; *The Yoga Sutra* that is today considered a perennial classic and guide to yoga practice; and the first biography to tell the Buddha’s story from his conception to his enlightenment in an epic poem known as the *Buddhacarita*. First, we will place these texts in their Hindu and Buddhist contexts and consider how they were used and understood differently in India. Then we examine how new meanings and values were discovered when these texts were translated in Europe and consumed in modern America. We will learn how to read “religiously” rather than as consumers, consider what criteria are used to identify a text as “sacred,” and investigate how texts create religious authority. We will also watch films that appropriate these texts and their practices for a western audience.

RELS 210.01/02 **Theories in the Study of Religions** **Prof. Lowe**
TR **9:25-10:40**

What is “religion”? Does everyone have it? Where does it come from? Is religion just a word? Is it “whatever a person wants it to be”? Religion certainly names something, but surely it doesn’t name EVERYTHING! So, how do we get past these two poles of misapprehension? The answer is theory. Join Dr. Lowe to examine the greatest hits of theories of religion in the modern era. Learn how to think about their strengths, weaknesses, and implications, and how to use them to think critically about the things we call “religion.”

RELS 255.01 **Philosophy of Religion** **Prof. Grantham**
MWF **10:00-10:50**

This course offers a survey of central issues in the philosophy of religion. We will examine the traditional arguments for and against the existence of a theistic God (cosmological, ontological, teleological, the problem of evil). We will also discuss important questions of epistemic justification: are we ever justified in believing in miracles? Is “faith” rationally defensible? Should the existence of other religious traditions undermine or temper our commitment to a particular faith? Is religious belief compatible with belief in science? We will approach these questions in philosophical spirit. That is, I will not assume any particular religious position is correct; nor will we assume an atheistic position. Rather, we will carefully and critically assess arguments on various sides of these topics.

RELS 260.01 **Native American Religions** **Prof. Keegan**
TR **1:40-2:55**

This course will introduce students to the history and contemporary realities of Native American traditions across North America. We will foreground Indigenous voices and evaluate and analyze the rich cultural, ceremonial, and ideological diversity of Native American religious practices and beliefs. We will analyze how engagement with Euro-American missionaries, settlers, and soldiers, dispossession, and cultural genocide affect ritual practice and religious belief over time and the need for decolonized approaches. Topics will include creation stories, sacred landscapes, food sovereignty, gender and the body, religion, and the environment, as well as contemporary revitalization and protest movements. Throughout, we will consider what “counts” as religion in America and how religious traditions shape and are shaped by other forms of difference.

RELS 315.01
MW

New Religious Movements
2:00-3:15

Prof. Siegler

New Religious Movements (NRMs) are often better known as “cults.” What are they? Where do they come from? In this course we study “cults” as global, historical and cultural phenomena. Specific topics to be covered include the Anti-Cult Movement, the “brainwashing” hypothesis, the occult and the New Age, and how “cults” are portrayed in popular media. Students will write original research papers on a “cult” of their choosing.

RELS 451.01
M

Capstone Colloquium
12:00-12:50

Prof. Huddlestun

This course is designed to provide a capstone experience for majors in Religious Studies, and it 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 advanced 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 lives. The Colloquium is designed to give students, in the company of other majors, the opportunity to: 1) review their own study of religion at CofC to identify their distinctive interests in particular subjects; 2) write an intellectual autobiography; 3) evaluate how their training served as a bridge between other academic disciplines; and 4) grasp how the study of religion might prepare them to put their learning to work in the world.

FYSU134.01/02

First Year Experience Environmental Storytelling:
Religion, Race and Nature
9:25-10:40 or 10:50-12:05

Prof. Keegan

TR

This course will deepen students understanding of the ways in which religion and race are intertwined with climate change through the lens of storytelling, with a focus on Indigenous, Black, and feminist voices. Students will be challenged to engage in big questions about meaning, values, and responsibilities in addressing pressing social and environmental issues. We will read stories from around the world, consider the art of storytelling, and write our own stories. The humanities offer an opportunity to reshape how we think about environmental problems and what counts as “the environment” itself. Students will be introduced to the realities of the climate crisis and the ways in which environmental sustainability relates to justice, politics, ethics, and religion.

HONS 175.01
MWF

Approaches to Religion: Religion and Protest
100-150

Prof. Fisher

This course is designed to introduce students to the academic study of religion by exploring the complex relationships between Religion and Protest in the Buddhist, Jewish, and Christian traditions. It will do so in three ways: 1) by examining texts and events in which religious commitments and/or communities have inspired individuals and groups to challenge perceived social wrongs; 2) by considering significant critiques of the role of religion and faith in social justice efforts; and 3) by examining the role that religion plays in contemporary ecological and political discussions. Through thoughtful analysis and lively discussion, we will examine the extent to which religion is considered an aid or an obstacle to social justice.