

RELIGION

219 Milbank Hall

212-854-2597

Department Assistant: Anna Hotard

At the beginning of the twenty-first century, religion plays a central role in virtually every aspect of human society around the globe. The Religion department's curriculum offers students the opportunity to explore the histories, texts, and practices of many of the world's religious communities and to consider both the profound ways in which religion has worked historically and how it continues to inform and affect the cultural, political, and ethical debates of the current moment. In addition, our curriculum invites students to reflect on the challenging theoretical questions that are generated by the category "religion" itself, an abstract category that has its own complicated history. The academic study of religion is self-consciously interdisciplinary, drawing upon the methods and insights of literary studies, historiography, social analysis, and cultural comparison. Moreover, the study of religion reminds us that religious identities demand sustained critical analysis, intersecting complexly as they do with race, class, gender, and ethnicity, among other categories of affiliation and identification. In its teaching, research projects, and public programming, the Religion department promotes engaged intellectual inquiry into the rich diversity of religious institutions, rituals, ideas, and communities both past and present.

The Departments of Religion at Barnard and Columbia marshal an array of academic approaches to the study of religion, representing the depth and diversity of the world's religious traditions, past and present. The category of religion—along with key related terms like belief, spirituality, mystical experience, and ritual—is historically and culturally contingent; many of our courses interrogate these terms and the conditions of their construction. Yet we are committed to engaging "religion," which persists so strongly in common usage and public debate, and is so hard to capture in any related domain or theoretical system.

Morningside Heights provides unique resources for the study of religion. The University's specialized programs and centers, especially its regional institutes, create a context for exploring in depth the linguistic, literary, political, and cultural milieus that bear on particular religious traditions. The new Center for the Study of Science and Religion enriches curricular offerings in that field. Barnard's Center for Research on Women often focuses on issues of ethics and policy where questions of religion and gender are paramount, and Barnard Religion faculty are particularly active in the area. Barnard and Columbia offer intensive language training in the languages of the major religious traditions of the world: Arabic, Chinese, Greek, Hebrew, Japanese, Latin, Persian, Sanskrit and other Indic languages, and Tibetan, among others. The Jewish Theological Seminary of America and Union Theological Seminary, with their world-renowned libraries, are our neighbors. And the city as a whole provides one of the world's best laboratories for the study of religion.

Our program tries to help students discover these resources and use them well. Many courses fulfill the College's general education requirements.

Mission

Goals for the Academic Study of Religion at Barnard

The faculty in Religion at Barnard have organized the curriculum around several interlocking goals:

- To help students learn to engage critically with different religious traditions in their historical and cultural settings;
- To attune students to the different theoretical, methodological, and disciplinary approaches required for critically interrogating different religious archives, performances, communal formations, artifacts, and ideas;
- To provide students with the critical tools for understanding the influence of religion on individuals and society;
- To open up the category of —religion# to critical investigation, both to consider its history and to understand how it comes to be applied to a variety of human and social phenomena.

Student Learning Outcomes

What Students Learn when Pursuing the Academic Study of Religion at Barnard

Students who are successful in our curriculum will learn to:

- Read/view/engage primary sources and scholarly materials critically and with subtlety;
- Situate religious texts, performances, artifacts, and ideas in historical, social, political, and cultural contexts;
- Understand the importance of perspective when analyzing religious ideas, claims, and sources;
- Express themselves fluently in writing and speaking about the materials under investigation.

In addition, they will:

- Develop an acquaintanceship with the history of theoretical debates about "religion" —how the intellectual history of the field has shaped the object of knowledge for the field—and
- Become familiar with a range of methodological approaches appropriate to the object of study (e.g., literary interpretation and analysis; historical contextualization; ethnographic participant observation; philosophical inquiry; analysis of visual, artistic, archaeological, architectural evidence).

Chair: Najam Haider (Professor)

Professors: Beth Berkowitz, Elizabeth Castelli, John Stratton Hawley

Associate Professor: Gale Kenny

Assistant Professors: Tiffany Hale, Tim Vasko

Term Assistant Professor: Meghan Hartman

Other officers of the University offering courses listed below:

Professors: Gil Anidjar, Peter Awn, Courtney Bender, Euan Cameron, Matthew Engelke, Katherine Ewing, Bernard Faure, Rachel McDermott, David (Max) Moerman, Wayne Proudfoot, Robert Somerville, Mark C. Taylor, Robert Thurman

Associate Professors: Michael Como, Josef Sorett, Yannik Thiem

Assistant Professors: Clémence Boulouque, Zhaohua Yang

Requirements for the Major

The department's strengths in comparative study, textual and social analysis, philosophy, theory, and cultural history allow students to balance close study in one area with a broad investigation of the field we name "religion." Working closely with an advisor in the department, majors construct a cluster of five courses that relate to one another in a coherent fashion (#1, below) and support the senior thesis. To complement this depth, they select three courses that lend breadth to their studies in religion (#2). Students considering Religion as a major should contact

the chair or a member of the department in their sophomore year to begin planning their programs.

The Religion major requires twelve courses (a minimum of 40 credits), as follows:

1) Major cluster: *five courses*, including one seminar. As many as two of these courses may come from other departments, and individually supervised research (UN 3901-2: Guided Readings) may also be included. This cluster of courses may be organized around a particular tradition or geographic area: Hinduism, Islam, Religion in America, etc. Alternatively, students may design clusters that focus on a set of related subjects and concerns, such as: Religion in New York; Religion in theory and practice; Religion and culture; Religious texts and histories; Religion and migration; Religion, women, gender; and Religion, race, nation, ethnicity.

Yet these are only exemplary. Students are urged to design their own clusters, supplementing departmental listings with religion-related courses posted on the Barnard Religion Department's website as [Religion Related Courses](#). Courses taken outside of the religion department must be approved by the student's adviser or department chair. Several [sample majors](#) are posted on the Barnard Religion Department's website.

2) Breadth: *three* Religion courses - either lecture or seminar - that lend geographical, historical, and/or disciplinary range to a student's program.

3) One semester of the course entitled "Religion Lab" (Religion GU4905), which focuses on methods, strategies, and materials utilized in the field of religious studies. Through guided exercises and selected exemplary readings, students learn research skills for locating and identifying primary and secondary sources. They are also exposed to important scholarly frameworks necessary for properly analyzing these sources. Majors are encouraged to take this course by their junior year as it serves to prepare them for their senior thesis.

4) One semester of the course entitled "Theory" (UN3799), engaging major theoretical issues in the field.

5) The two-semester Senior Research Seminar (BC 3997-8), which must be taken in sequence, beginning in autumn and continuing through the spring, and which structures the experience of preparing a senior thesis. Students work together in this seminar to develop, critique, and accomplish their research projects, submitting a formal proposal and partial draft in the fall, and completing the research and writing in the spring.

Language Courses: Students may fulfill up to two of their required twelve courses through language study pending department approval.

If a language is considered vital or important to a student's major concentration, she may petition for credit with 1 year (two semesters) of courses counting as one course towards the religion major.

To summarize:

5 courses – Concentration
3 courses – Breadth
1 course –Religion Lab
1 course –Theory
2 courses – Senior Seminar

The department encourages study abroad, particularly in summers or in one semester of the junior year, and is eager to help facilitate internships and funded research. These possibilities often contribute very meaningfully to the senior essay project.

Minors and Combined Majors

A Religion minor comprises five Religion courses at any level, one of which must be RELI GU4105 RELIGION LAB. In addition, students are encouraged to include among the remaining four courses at least one seminar. Students intending to minor in Religion should contact the department chair.

Combined majors are offered with programs in Human Rights and in Jewish Studies.

Courses of Instruction

RELI UN1310 GOD. 3.00 points.

What is religion? And what does God have to do with it? This course will seek to engage a range of answers to these questions. The class is not a survey of all religious traditions. Rather, it will address religion as a comparative problem between traditions as well as between scholarly and methodological approaches. We will engage the issue of perspective in, for example, the construction of a conflict between religion and science, religion and modernity, as well as some of the distinctions now current in the media between religion, politics, economics and race. And we will wonder about God and gods.

RELI UN2304 CHRISTIANITY. 3.00 points.

Survey of Christianity from its beginnings through the Reformation. Based on lectures and discussions of readings in primary source translations, this course will cover prominent developments in the history of Christianity. The structure will allow students to rethink commonly held notions about the evolution of modern Christianity with the texture of historical influence

RELI UN2306 INTRO TO JUDAISM. 4.00 points.

A historical overview of Jewish belief and practice as these have crystallized and changed over the centuries. Special attention to ritual and worship, the forms of religious literature, central concepts, religious leadership and institutions, Israel among the nations

Fall 2025: RELI UN2306

Course Number	Section/Call Number	Times/Location	Instructor	Points	Enrollment
RELI 2306	001/00013	T Th 10:10am - 11:25am 418 Barnard Hall	Beth Berkowitz	4.00	55/55

RELI UN2309 HINDUISM. 4.00 points.

CC/GS/SEAS: Partial Fulfillment of Global Core Requirement

Considers efforts since 1900 to synthesize a coherent understanding of what Hinduism entails, sometimes under the heading of sanatana dharma. Using a rubric provided by the Bhagavad Gita, explores philosophical/theological (jnana), ritual (karma), and devotional (bhakti) aspects of Hindu life and thought

Spring 2025: RELI UN2309

Course Number	Section/Call Number	Times/Location	Instructor	Points	Enrollment
RELI 2309	001/00508	M W 11:40am - 12:55pm 202 Milbank Hall	Meghan Hartman	4.00	32/35

Fall 2025: RELI UN2309

Course Number	Section/Call Number	Times/Location	Instructor	Points	Enrollment
RELI 2309	001/00014	M W 1:10pm - 2:25pm 323 Milbank Hall	Meghan Hartman	4.00	55/55

RELI UN2316 HINDUISM - DISCUSSION. 0.00 points.**RELI UN2405 CHINESE RELIGIOUS TRADITIONS. 4.00 points.**

CC/GS/SEAS: Partial Fulfillment of Global Core Requirement

This course provides a chronological and thematic introduction to Chinese religions from their beginnings until modern times. It examines distinctive concepts, practices and institutions in the religions of China. Emphasis will be placed on the diversity and unity of religious expressions in China, with readings drawn from a wide-range of texts: religious scriptures, philosophical texts, popular literature and modern historical and ethnographic studies. Special attention will be given to those forms of religion common to both “elite” and “folk” culture: cosmology, family and communal rituals, afterlife, morality and mythology. The course also raises more general questions concerning gender, class, political patronage, and differing concepts of religion

RELI UN2779 INTRODUCTION TO NATIVE AMERICAN RELIGIOUS TRADITIONS. 3.00 points.

There are over 800 distinct Native American nations currently within the borders of the United States. This course offers a broad introduction to the diversity of American Indian religious systems and their larger functions in communities and in history. We will explore general themes in the study of Native American religious traditions as well as look at some specific examples of practices, ideas, and beliefs. Of particular importance are the history and effects of colonialism and missionization on Native peoples, their continuing struggles for religious freedom and cultural and linguistic survival, and the ways in which American Indians engage with religion and spirituality, both past and present, to respond to social, cultural, political, and geographical change

RELI UN3199 THEORY. 4.00 points.

An exploration of alternative theoretical approaches to the study of religion as well as other areas of humanistic inquiry. The methods considered include: sociology, anthropology, philosophy, hermeneutics, psychoanalysis, structuralism, genealogy, and deconstruction. (Previous title: Juniors Colloquium)

Spring 2025: RELI UN3199

Course Number	Section/Call Number	Times/Location	Instructor	Points	Enrollment
RELI 3199	001/00509	T 2:10pm - 4:00pm 111 Milstein Center	Beth Berkowitz	4.00	18/25

Fall 2025: RELI UN3199

Course Number	Section/Call Number	Times/Location	Instructor	Points	Enrollment
RELI 3199	001/10468	M 12:10pm - 2:00pm Room TBA	Courtney Bender	4.00	20/20

RELI UN3202 RELIGION IN EARLY AMERICA. 4.00 points.

This course examines religion in North America from the 1500s through the early 1800s with a focus on colonial projects, race and slavery, and gender. We begin with comparing Spanish and French Catholic and English Protestant colonies, missionary efforts, and systems of enslavement as well as how religion factored into Native Americans and African people's survival and resistance. The second part of the class turns to the 1700s and the emergence of religious revivals and evangelicalism alongside increasing religious variety in the British colonies of North America. Finally, we examine the early United States (1790s-1850s) and ask how disestablishment, imperial ambitions, new religious movement, and debates over the “slavery question” transformed the religious landscape. While focused on religious history (and primarily different Christian traditions), the category of “religion” itself and theoretical frameworks for studying religion are also integral to the class

RELI UN2310 Intro to Judaism- Discussion. 0.00 points.

A historical overview of Jewish belief and practice as these have crystallized and changed over the centuries. Special attention to ritual and worship, the forms of religious literature, central concepts, religious leadership and institutions, Israel among the nations

Fall 2025: RELI UN2310

Course Number	Section/Call Number	Times/Location	Instructor	Points	Enrollment
RELI 2310	001/00454	W 5:10pm - 6:00pm 222 Milbank Hall		0.00	3/30
RELI 2310	002/00455	T 5:10pm - 6:00pm 325 Milbank Hall		0.00	4/30

RELI UN3203 RELIGION IN THE MODERN US. 4.00 points.

This course examines the history of religion in the United States from the Civil War to the present through thematic units focused on the legal structures of religious freedom; race, religion, and nationality; healing, aesthetics, and embodiment; and, finally, religion and politics. Over the course of the semester, students will explore various religious communities as well as the ways social, political, and economic factors have shaped those traditions – and how religious communities have in turn shaped US society, politics, and culture. Students will also be introduced to key themes and debates in the field of American religious studies

Spring 2025: RELI UN3203

Course Number	Section/Call Number	Times/Location	Instructor	Points	Enrollment
RELI 3203	001/00510	M W 2:40pm - 3:55pm 207 Milbank Hall	Gale Kenny	4.00	27/40

RELI UN3210 MILLENNIUM: APOCALYPSE AND UTOPIA. 3.00 points.

Study of apocalyptic thinking and practice in the western religious tradition, with a focus on American apocalyptic religious movements and their relation to contemporary cultural productions, as well as notions of history and politics

Fall 2025: RELI UN3210

Course Number	Section/Call Number	Times/Location	Instructor	Points	Enrollment
RELI 3210	001/00457	M W 2:40pm - 3:55pm LI001 Milstein Center	Elizabeth Castelli	3.00	17/32

RELI UN3213 Religion In Early America- Discussion. 0.00 points.

This course accompanies RELI UN3203: Religion in the Modern US to examine the history of religion in the United States from the Civil War to the present through thematic units focused on the legal structures of religious freedom; race, religion, and nationality; healing, aesthetics, and embodiment; and, finally, religion and politics. Over the course of the semester, students will explore various religious communities as well as the ways social, political, and economic factors have shaped those traditions – and how religious communities have in turn shaped US society, politics, and culture. Students will also be introduced to key themes and debates in the field of American religious studies

RELI UN3771 Indigenous Enlightenment. 4.00 points.

What is the source of truth and authority? What is the origin of the world and how does that determine the social order? Who ought to rule, why, and how? What are the standards for measuring justice and injustice? What is our relationship to the environment around us and how should its resources be distributed among people? How do we relate to those who are different from us, and what does it mean to be a community in the first place? Historically, the answers to these questions that have been described as “religious” and “political” have been the restricted to a specific tradition of Western European Christianity and its secular afterlives. However, these are questions that every society asks, in order to be a society in the first place. This course analyzes how indigenous peoples in the Americas asked and answered these questions through the first three centuries of Western European imperial rule. At the same time, this course pushes students to question what gets categorized as uniquely “indigenous” thought, how, and why.

RELI UN3304 Memory and Violence in Shi'i Islam. 4 points.

Not offered during 2024-2025 academic year.

Why do humans insist on remembering and often memorializing violence? And how do they decide when violence is worth remembering or not? This course ponders these questions through a case study by examining the martyrdom of Husayn b. Ali (d. 680), grandson of the Prophet Muhammad and the third Imam in Shi'i Islam. We will explore the many ways in which this violent event has acquired meaning for people around the world from the seventh century until today using the lens of “collective memory” and its role in community formation. There are no prerequisites, but background knowledge of Middle Eastern history will be very helpful.

RELI UN3314 QURAN. 4.00 points.

This course conceives of the Qur'an as a living text in constant flux through interactions with other religious traditions. It focuses on developing an understanding of the Qur'an's form, style, and content through a close reading of comparable religious texts. Major topics covered include the Qur'anic theory of prophecy, its treatment of the Biblical tradition (both that of the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament), and its perspective on pre-Islamic pagan religion. The central goals of the course include the ability to (a) analyze primary religious sources in a critical and objective manner and (b) construct coherent arguments based on concrete evidence. In a class of this nature, class members will naturally hold or develop a wide variety of opinions about the topics covered. The goal is not to adopt a single opinion concerning the interpretation of a particular text, but rather to support personal conclusions in a clear logical manner

Spring 2025: RELI UN3314

Course Number	Section/Call Number	Times/Location	Instructor	Points	Enrollment
RELI 3314	001/00511	M W 2:40pm - 3:55pm 203 Diana Center	Najam Haider	4.00	23/30

RELI UN3340 EARLY CHRISTIANITY. 3.00 points.

Examines the competing currents within early Christianity, with emphasis placed on the literary and social expressions of Christian belief and identity. Topics to be covered include persecution and martyrdom, debates over authority and religious experience, orthodoxy and heresy, and asceticism and monasticism, among others

RELI UN3406 Space, Narrative, and Religion in India. 3 points.

Not offered during 2024-2025 academic year.

Course Description: This course is fundamentally about sacred places and the stories that people tell about and within them. We will explore the role that narratives – mythological, historical, personal, and academic – have played in the creation, maintenance and conceptualization of sacred spaces in South Asia. Each class in the first section of the course is devoted to a particular site or category of sites, and examines the roles that religious texts and iconography play in the traditions with which the sites are associated. In the second section of the course, we will consider ethnographic perspectives on religious journeys. Finally, in the third section, we will focus on the idealization of region or nation as a sacred space, and examines the manner in which narratives are invoked to formulate identities and to negotiate conflicts and differentials of power.

As we navigate these topics, we will explore answers to the following questions: How are spaces made “sacred”? What are the multiple types of narratives that come to be associated with sacred spaces, and what roles do they play in their production? How are such narratives transmitted, and for whom? How do religious practitioners utilize these spaces and their narratives in order to negotiate various facets of daily life, and in order to situate themselves within the religious landscape of South Asia?

RELI UN3407 Muslims in Diaspora. 4 points.

CC/GS/SEAS: Partial Fulfillment of Global Core Requirement

Consideration of controversies surrounding mosque-building, headscarves, honor killing, and other publicized issues that expose tensions surrounding citizenship and belonging for Muslims in North America and Europe. Exploration of film and other media representations of Muslims in the West. There will be additional meeting times for film screenings

RELI UN3517 Queer Theory, Religion, and Their Discontents. 3.00 points.

For the most part queer studies and religious studies have met each other with great suspicion and little interest in the conceptual resources of the respectively other field. Our guiding questions will be: What does religion have to do with queerness? What does queerness have to do with religion? Queer theory and activists, unless they already identify as religious, often have little or little good to say about religion. Conversely, many religious traditions intensively regulate gender, sex, sexuality, and especially queerness. This course will explore how religious studies can enrich queer theory and how queer theory can reshape our thinking about religious studies. But beyond the mutual disinterest, anxieties, and animosities, queer studies and religious studies share actually a whole range of core interests and questions, such as embodiment, sexuality, gender-variability, coloniality, race appearing as religious identity and religious identity as gendered, as well as the role of catastrophe, utopia, and redemption in our experience of the world. We will examine questions about religion come to the fore when we paying especially attention to queerness, gender, sexuality, pleasure, pain, and desire. Equally, we will examine how queer discourses mobilize religious and theological images and ideas, especially where these images and ideas are no longer clearly recognizable as having religious origins. Rather than trying to settle on definitive answers, this course will cultivate a process of open-ended collective inquiry in which students will be encouraged to think autonomously and challenge facile solutions. Students should come away from the course with an expanded sense of how we grapple with issues related to gender, sexuality, desire, and embodiment in our everyday lives and how religion and religious formations are entangled with these issues well beyond religious communities. Ideally, students should experience this course as enlarging the set of critical tools at their hands for creative and rigorous thinking

RELI UN3671 Religion and Human Rights. 4.00 points.

What is the relationship between religion and human rights? How have different religious traditions conceived of “the human” as a being worthy of inherent dignity and respect, particularly in moments of political, military, economic, and ecological crisis? How and why have modern regimes of human rights privileged some of these ideas and marginalized others? What can these complicated relationships between religion and human rights explain some of the key crises in human rights law and politics today, and what avenues can be charted for moving forward? In this class, we will attempt to answer these questions by first developing a theoretical understanding of some of the key debates about the origins, trajectories, and legacies of modern human rights’ religious entanglements. We will then move on to examine various examples of ideas about and institutions for protecting “humanity” from different regions and histories. Specifically, we will examine how different societies, organizations, and religious traditions have addressed questions of war and violence; freedom of belief and expression; gender and sexual orientation; economic inequality; ecology; and the appropriate ways to punish and remember wrongdoing. In doing so, we will develop a repertoire of theoretical and empirical tools that can help us address both specific crises of human rights in various contexts, as well as the general crisis of faith and observance of human rights as a universal norm and aspiration for peoples everywhere

Spring 2025: RELI UN3671

Course Number	Section/Call Number	Times/Location	Instructor	Points	Enrollment
RELI 3671	001/00512	M 12:10pm - 2:00pm 407 Barnard Hall	Timothy Vasko	4.00	14/15

Fall 2025: RELI UN3671

Course Number	Section/Call Number	Times/Location	Instructor	Points	Enrollment
RELI 3671	001/00460	F 2:10pm - 4:00pm 306 Milbank Hall	Timothy Vasko	4.00	15/15

RELI UN3881 Indigenous Peoples in International Law I. 4.00 points.

How did European-Christians justify the colonization of the Americas? Did these justifications vary between different European empires, and between the Protestant and Catholic faiths, and if so, how? Do these justifications remain in effect in modern jurisprudence and ministries? This class explores these questions by introducing students to the Doctrine of Discovery. The Doctrine of Discovery is the defining legal rationale for European Colonization in the Western Hemisphere. The Doctrine has its origins in a body of ecclesiastic, legal, and philosophical texts dating to the late-fifteenth century, and was summarized by Chief Justice John Marshall of the United States Supreme Court, in the final, unanimous decision the judiciary issued on the 1823 case *Johnson v. M'Intosh*. Students will be introduced to the major, primary texts that make up the Doctrine, as well as contemporary critical studies of these texts and the Doctrine in general

RELI UN3901 GUIDED READING AND RESEARCH. 1.00-4.00 points.

Prerequisites: the instructors permission

RELI BC3996 Religion Salon: New Directions. 1.00 point.

The Religion Salon is a one-point course in the Religion department, designed to offer students an introduction to new areas of the academic study of religion and/or new approaches to the field. The Religion Salon will be offered as a supplement to an existing course offered in the same semester and will be open to (but not required of) the students in that existing course as well as to students who wish to take the Salon as a stand-alone one-point course. The Religion Salon will feature guest scholars whose research and teaching extend into new areas and/or engage in new approaches to the academic study of religion

Spring 2025: RELI BC3996

Course Number	Section/Call Number	Times/Location	Instructor	Points	Enrollment
RELI 3996	001/00513	T 4:10pm - 6:00pm 307 Milbank Hall	Meghan Hartman	1.00	23/30

RELI BC3997 SENIOR RESEARCH SEMINAR. 4.00 points.

Working research seminar devoted to helping students produce a substantive piece of writing that will represent the culmination of their work at the College and in the major

Fall 2025: RELI BC3997

Course Number	Section/Call Number	Times/Location	Instructor	Points	Enrollment
RELI 3997	001/00461	W 4:10pm - 6:00pm 227 Milbank Hall	Meghan Hartman	4.00	5/15

RELI BC3998 SENIOR RESEARCH SEMINAR. 4.00 points.

Working research seminar devoted to helping students produce a substantive piece of writing that will represent the culmination of their work at the College and in the major

Spring 2025: RELI BC3998

Course Number	Section/Call Number	Times/Location	Instructor	Points	Enrollment
RELI 3998	001/00514	W 6:10pm - 8:00pm 318 Milbank Hall	Najam Haider	4.00	8/15

RELI GU4002 CURATING ISLAM IN NEW YORK CITY. 4.00 points.

This course focuses on the ways in which museums conceptualize, contextualize, curate and display Islamic art. In the process, it interrogates the degree to which the orientalist past and the secular present shapes our understanding of the Muslim world. Students will not just engage with material objects from Muslim societies but also consider the choices museums make about their display and presentation. These choices, in turn, speak to the role of museums in defining a specific understanding of the "sacred." Finally, students will learn to thoughtfully and critically pose questions about the roles that museums as public institutions play in shaping public and private understandings of Islam. The course begins with a general discussion of material objects in the study of religion. This is followed by a broad survey of Islamic Art which both describes and critiques the category as it has been framed in the Academy. Students then visit a number of museums to learn about the style and content of their Islamic collections. The course concludes by engaging a different kind of curation, namely oral histories in the Brooklyn Museum

RELI GU4105 RELIGION LAB. 4.00 points.

In their research, scholars of religion employ a variety of methods to analyze texts ranging from historical documents to objects of visual culture. This course acquaints students with both the methods and the materials utilized in the field of religious studies. Through guided exercises, they acquire research skills for utilizing sources and become familiarized with dominant modes of scholarly discourse. The class is organized around a series of research scavenger hunts that are due at the start of each week's class and assigned during the discussion section (to be scheduled on the first day of class). Additional class meeting on Thursdays

Fall 2025: RELI GU4105

Course Number	Section/Call Number	Times/Location	Instructor	Points	Enrollment
RELI 4105	001/00462	Th 12:10pm - 2:00pm 912 Milstein Center	Elizabeth Castelli	4.00	9/15

RELI GU4172 Confession. 4.00 points.

This seminar explores the idea and practice of "confession" in a range of manifestations (in legal and judicial contexts, in religious practice, in memoir/autobiography, in political and personal reckoning with the past, in art and popular culture, among others) and from a variety of disciplinary perspectives (media studies, history, theology, literature, psychoanalysis, art history, and journalism). As the sacramental practice of confession recedes from significance within traditional religious contexts, the social practice of confession expands into new arenas. This seminar is devoted to theorizing this shifting terrain through the critical examination of a variety of primary sources and scholarly interventions

RELI GU4207 Religion and the Afro-Native Experience. 4.00 points.

African Americans and Native Americans have a shared history of racial oppression in America. However, the prevailing lenses through which scholars understand settler colonialism, religion, and black and indigenous histories focus overwhelmingly on the dynamics between Europeans and these respective groups. How might our understanding of these subjects change when viewed from a different point of departure, if we center the history of entanglements between black and native lives? How does religion structure the overlapping experiences of Afro-Native peoples in North America? From political movements in Minneapolis, Oakland, and New York City to enslavement from the Cotton Belt to the Rio Grande, this class will explore how Africans, Native Americans, and their descendants adapted to shifting contexts of race and religion in America. The course will proceed thematically by examining experiences of war, dislocation, survival, and diaspora

Spring 2025: RELI GU4207

Course Number	Section/Call Number	Times/Location	Instructor	Points	Enrollment
RELI 4207	001/00515	W 2:10pm - 4:00pm 223 Milbank Hall	Tiffany Hale	4.00	15/15

RELI GU4304 Krishna. 4 points.

CC/GS/SEAS: Partial Fulfillment of Global Core Requirement

Study of a single deity in the Hindu pantheon as illuminated in art, music, dance, drama, theological treatises, patterns of ritual, and texts both classic and modern. Special attention to Krishna's consort Radha, to Krishna's reception in the West, and to his portrayal on Indian television.

RELI GU4322 EXPLORING THE SHARIA: ISLAMIC LAW. 4.00 points.
CC/GS/SEAS: Partial Fulfillment of Global Core Requirement

The platform of every modern “Islamist” political party calls for the implementation of “the shari’a.” This term is invariably (and incorrectly) interpreted as an unchanging legal code dating back to 7th century Arabia. In reality, Islamic law is an organic and constantly evolving human project aimed at ascertaining God’s will in a given historical and cultural context. This course offers a detailed and nuanced look at the Islamic legal methodology and its evolution over the last 1400 years. The first part of the semester is dedicated to “classical” Islamic jurisprudence, concentrating on the manner in which jurists used the Qur’an, the Sunna (the model of the Prophet), and rationality to articulate a coherent legal system. The second part of the course focuses on those areas of the law that engender passionate debate and controversy in the contemporary world. Specifically, we examine the discourse surrounding Islamic family (medical ethics, marriage, divorce, women’s rights) and criminal (capital punishment, apostasy, suicide/martyrdom) law. The course ends by discussing the legal implications of Muslims living as minorities in non-Islamic countries and the effects of modernity on the foundations of Islamic jurisprudence. This class is designed for students interested in a close examination of the Islamic legal system; it is not a broad introduction to the Islamic religion. The format of the class will vary from topic to topic but students should anticipate *extensive* participation through in-class debates

RELI GU4325 Sufism. 4 points.

Prerequisites: Permission of instructor.

This is a seminar for advanced undergraduate and graduate students who wish to gain an understanding of the richness of Sufism (Islamic mysticism). We will examine the historical origins, development and institutionalization of Sufism, including long-standing debates over its place within the wider Islamic tradition. By way of a close reading of a wide range of primary and secondary sources, we will examine Sufi attitudes toward the body, Sufi understandings of lineage, power and religious authority, as well as the continued importance of Sufism in the modern world

RELI GU4326 SUFISM IN SOUTH ASIA. 4.00 points.

Sufism or tassawuf has misleadingly been described as the mystical side of Islam, implying that it is somehow detached from the material world. Throughout the history of Islam, Sufi ideas, practices, and institutions have borne a complex, intimate, and sometimes fraught relationship with other aspects of Islamic tradition and practice, a relationship that has also been profoundly impacted by Orientalist scholarship in the colonial period and by global reformist currents in the postcolonial period. This seminar for advanced undergraduates and graduate students is an interdisciplinary investigation of how Sufism has been affected by the historical, sociocultural, political, and everyday environments in which it is experienced and practiced, with a particular focus on South Asia. Eclectic in approach, we will begin by considering how Sufism has been construed and even constructed by scholars, considering how modern notions of the self, religion, and the political have shaped scholarly understandings of what Sufism is. Focusing on bodily practices and well known individual Sufis who lived in South Asia during different historical periods, we will use them as a vehicle for understanding Sufi experience within the context of the evolving Sufi orders within specific local spaces. We will consider why Sufism has become such a target of controversy and ambivalence among Muslims in the modern world and trace some of the changing controversies and tensions that Sufis have struggled with over time, focusing on their understandings of self, society and reality

RELI GU4345 World Religions. 4.00 points.

(1) We begin with a study for the Parliament of the World’s Religions (PWR), held at the Columbian Exhibition at Chicago in 1893, because it is so often regarded as one of the great annunciatory moments for the field. A number of the 19th-century European “founding fathers” were invited or present, as was Swami Vivekananda, who has been at least as significant as any of them for the development of the field as a global idea. The PWR’s American location broadens Tomoko Masuzawa’s magisterial description of the “invention of world religions” by initially shifting attention away from its European base. It also introduces us to the element of display involved in announcing this idea and to one of its most important institutional partners: the University of Chicago. (2) In the second part of the course we investigate the consolidation/invention of the conceptual entities that comprise “world religions,” as well as debates about just how many of them they are, and by what principle of accounting: To exemplify the production of “isms” that are said to comprise the world religions, we investigate the conceptual origins of Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, the Judeo-Christian Tradition, and most recently The Indigenous. (3) At the end we consider an institution founded around the idea of World Religions—Harvard’s Center for the Study of World Religions—and wonder how it compares to what has been done at Columbia and its neighbor institutions in New York: the Interfaith Center of New York, the Jewish Theological Seminary, and Union Theological Seminary. (4) The course includes a workshop (2/21) in which we discuss various materials we might use if we ourselves were asked to teach a “world religions” course. We conclude with a mini-conference (4/24) in which you present your work and respond to that of others. There are two possibilities for the sort of work you might do, as listed below. Whichever you choose, please discuss your intentions with me by Friday, February 23. A two-page proposal and draft bibliography are due by midnight that day. OPTIONS: (a) You can do a research paper on some aspect of the course—possibly extending to areas about which we have not specifically read and talked. (b) Or, if you wish, you can design your own World Religions course, providing a syllabus with all its constituent parts and a 7-8 double-spaced paper explaining why you have structured the course as you have. Be sure to say how you envision the group of students you’ll be working with. As part of your preparation, discuss the contents and approach of your course with members—or in some way affiliates (even apostates!)—of at least three of the religious groups or traditions involved

RELI GU4513 BUDDHISM AND NEUROSCIENCE. 4.00 points.

With the Dalai Lamas marked interest in recent advances in neuroscience, the question of the compatibility between Buddhist psychology and neuroscience has been raised in a number of conferences and studies. This course will examine the state of the question, look at claims made on both sides, and discuss whether or not there is a convergence between Buddhist discourse about the mind and scientific discourse about the brain

RELI GU4535 BUDDHIST CONTEMPLATIVE SCIENCES. 4.00 points.

Prerequisites: the instructor's permission.

Buddhist arts and sciences traditionally are divided into the interconnected disciplines of ethics (śīla), wisdom/philosophy (prajñā), and "meditation" or experiential cultivation (samādhi/bhāvanā). This seminar course introduces the latter discipline, thus complementing and completing Prof. Yarnall's Columbia seminars on Buddhist Ethics (RELI UN3500) and Indo-Tibetan Buddhist Philosophy (RELI GU4630), either of which—in addition to his introductory lecture course on Indo-Tibetan Buddhism (RELI UN2205)—are encouraged as prerequisites. This course will provide a detailed presentation of key Buddhist contemplative sciences, including: stabilizing meditation (śamatha); analytic insight meditation (vipaśyanā); cultivation of the four immeasurables, and form and formless trances; mind cultivation (lo jong); mindfulness meditation; Zen meditation; great perfection (dzogchen); and the subtle body-mind states activated and transformed through advanced tantric yoga techniques. These arts and sciences will be explored both within their traditional interdisciplinary frameworks, as well as in dialog with related contemporary disciplines, including: cognitive sciences, neuroscience, psychology, psychiatry, philosophy, epistemology, and so forth. To be conducted in a mixed lecture/seminar format (active, prepared participation required)

RELI GU4616 TECHNOLOGY,RELIGION,FUTURE. 4.00 points.

This seminar will examine the history of the impact of technology and media on religion and vice versa before bringing into focus the main event: religion today and in the future. We'll read the classics as well as review current writing, video and other media, bringing thinkers such as Eliade, McLuhan, Mumford and Weber into dialogue with the current writing of Kurzweil, Lanier and Taylor, and look at, among other things: ethics in a Virtual World; the relationship between Burning Man, a potential new religion, and technology; the relevance of God and The Rapture in Kurzweil's Singularity; and what will become of karma when carbon-based persons merge with silicon-based entities and other advanced technologies

Spring 2025: RELI GU4616

Course Number	Section/Call Number	Times/Location	Instructor	Points	Enrollment
RELI 4616	001/13967	Th 4:10pm - 6:00pm 201 80 Claremont	David Kittay	4.00	20/25

Fall 2025: RELI GU4616

Course Number	Section/Call Number	Times/Location	Instructor	Points	Enrollment
RELI 4616	001/14955	Th 12:10pm - 2:00pm Room TBA	David Kittay	4.00	3/25

RELI GU4619 Islam in Popular Culture. 4.00 points.

This course interrogates seminal issues in the academic study of Islam through its popular representation in various forms of media from movies and television to novels and comic books. The class is structured around key theoretical readings from a range of academic disciplines ranging from art history and anthropology to comparative literature and religion. The course begins by placing the controversies surrounding the visual depiction of Muhammad in historical perspective (Gruber). This is followed by an examination of modern portrayals of Muslims in film that highlights both the vilification of the "other" (Shaheen) and the persistence of colonial discourses centered on the "native informant" (Mamdani). Particular emphasis is given to recent pop cultural works that challenge these simplistic discourses of Islam. The second half of the course revisits Muhammad, employing an anthropological framework (Asad) to understand the controversies surrounding Salman Rushdie's Satanic Verses. The obsession with a gendered depiction of Islam is then examined through an anthropological framework that sheds light on the problems of salvation narratives (Abu Lughod). The course ends with a look at the unique history of Islam in America, particularly the tension between immigrant and African-American communities

RELI GU4630 INDO-TIBETAN BUDDHIST PHILOSOPHY. 4.00 points.

Examination of topics in the religious philosophy of Tibet

Spring 2025: RELI GU4630

Course Number	Section/Call Number	Times/Location	Instructor	Points	Enrollment
RELI 4630	001/13968	Th 2:10pm - 4:00pm 201 80 Claremont	Thomas Yarnall	4.00	12/15
RELI 4630	002/20171		Thomas Yarnall	4.00	1/1

RELI GU4998 RELIGION AND THE INDIAN WARS. 4.00 points.

The frontier is central to the United States' conception of its history and place in the world. It is an abstract concept that reflects the American mythology of progress and is rooted in religious ideas about land, labor, and ownership. Throughout the nineteenth century, these ideas became more than just abstractions. They were tested, hardened, and revised by U.S. officials and the soldiers they commanded on American battlefields. This violence took the form of the Civil War as well as the series of U.S. military encounters with Native Americans known as the Indian Wars. These separate yet overlapping campaigns have had profound and lasting consequences for the North American landscape and its peoples. This course explores the relationship between religious ideology and violence in the last half of nineteenth century. Organized chronologically and geographically, we will engage with both primary sources and classic works in the historiography of the Indian Wars to examine how religion shaped U.S. policy and race relations from the start of the Civil War through approximately 1910

Spring 2025: RELI GU4998

Course Number	Section/Call Number	Times/Location	Instructor	Points	Enrollment
RELI 4998	001/00516	Th 2:10pm - 4:00pm 111 Milstein Center	Tiffany Hale	4.00	10/15

RELI GU4999 GLOBAL INDIGENOUS RELIGIOUS HISTORIES. 4.00 points.

Nomads, natives, peasants, hill people, aboriginals, hunter-gatherers, First Nations—these are just a handful of the terms in use to define indigenous peoples globally. The names these groups use to describe themselves, as well as the varying religious practices, attitudes, and beliefs among these populations are far more numerous and complex. For much of recorded history however, colonial centers of power have defined indigenous peoples racially and often in terms of lacking religion; as pagan, barbarian, non-modern, and without history or civilization. Despite this conundrum of identity and classification, indigenous religious traditions often have well-documented and observable pasts. This course considers the challenges associated with studying indigenous religious history, as well as the changing social, political, and legal dimensions of religious practice among native groups over time and in relationship to the state. Organized thematically and geographically, we will engage with classic works of ethnohistory, environmental history, indigenous studies, anthropology, and religious studies as well as primary sources that include legal documentation, military records, personal testimony, and oral narrative

Spring 2025: RELI GU4999

Course Number	Section/Call Number	Times/Location	Instructor	Points	Enrollment
RELI 4999	001/00517	T 10:10am - 12:00pm 407 Barnard Hall	Tiffany Hale	4.00	14/15