Religious Studies (RLS)

Major and Minor in Religious Studies
Department of Asian and Asian American Studies, College of Arts and Sciences

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Minors of particular interest to students majoring in Religious Studies: China Studies (CNS), Classics (CLS), Japanese Studies (JNS), Judaic Studies (JDS), Korean Studies (KOR), Medieval Studies (MVL), Middle Eastern Studies (MES), Philosophy (PHI), South Asian Studies (SOA)

Affiliated Faculty
William Chittick, Religious Studies, Asian and Asian American Studies
Robert Goldenberg, History
Hongkyung Kim, Asian and Asian American Studies
Peter Manchester, Philosophy
Sachiko Murata, Asian and Asian American Studies
Sung-Bae Park, Asian and Asian American Studies

Teaching Assistants
Estimated Number: 4

Adjunct Faculty
Estimated Number: 2

The Program in Religious Studies offers an interdisciplinary approach to the analysis of religion in its many forms and aspects. To the variety of religious traditions, both living and historical, the program brings the techniques and questions of philosophy, history, literature, and the human sciences. Designed for flexibility in meeting students' interests and needs, the Religious Studies program offers a major, a minor, an honors program, and a variety of electives useful for broadening one's knowledge of religious phenomena, for supplementing the major program in many related fields of humanities and social science, and for meeting general education requirements.

The major in Religious Studies is an attractive option for students seeking a general liberal arts education with strength in humanities. It develops skills in reading texts with sophisticated critical awareness, and in expressing complex ideas orally and in writing. It affords insight into the fundamental traditions that shape historic cultures, East and West, and forms habits of tolerance and appreciation of unfamiliar ideas and values.

Students also major in Religious Studies intending to go on to further professional training in this field or in closely related ones like law and diplomacy. Those who wish to pursue graduate studies are encouraged to study the languages needed for their areas of interest, and to supplement their major requirements with related work in history, philosophy, and the arts.

Further information and advising in regard to any of the program's services are available through the program director.

Courses Offered in Religious Studies

See the Course Descriptions listing in this Bulletin for complete information.

RLS 101-B Western Religions
RLS 102-B Eastern Religions
RLS 230-G Judaism
RLS 240-J Confucianism and Taoism
RLS 246-J Korean and Japanese Religions
RLS 256-J Hinduism
RLS 260-J Buddhism
RLS 270-I Christianity
RLS 280-J Islam
RLS 301-G Sources and Methods
RLS 310-G Biblical Theology
RLS 320-G The Rabbinic Tradition
RLS 336-G Feminine Spirituality
RLS 367-J Meditation and Enlightenment
RLS 368-G Islamic Classics
RLS 382-G Japanese Buddhism
RLS 390-G, 391-G Special Topics
RLS 400 Religious Studies Seminar
RLS 415-G Judaic Response to Catastrophe
RLS 447 Readings in Religious Studies
RLS 475 Undergraduate Teaching Practicum
RLS 495, 496 Senior Honors Projects

Related Courses in Other Programs

See the Course Descriptions listing in this Bulletin for complete information.

AAS 211-F Asian and Asian American Studies Topics in the Social Sciences
AAS 212-G Asian and Asian American Studies Topics in the Humanities
AAS 317-J Islamic Art
AAS 320-G Literature of India
AAS 321-G Korean Literature
AAS 322-G Literature of Japan
AAS 326-G Indian Mythology
AAS 327-G Great Epics of India: Ramayana and Mahabharata
AFS 395-J Religions of the Caribbean
ANT 351-F Comparative Religion
ANT 358-J Ways to Civilization
ARH 305-I Art and Culture of the Middle Ages
ARH 326-J Arts of Ancient Mesoamerica
ARH 328-J Arts of West Africa
CLS 215-I Classical Mythology
EGL/JDH 261-B The Bible as Literature
EGL 342-G Milton
HIS 235-I The Early Middle Ages
HIS 236-I The Late Middle Ages
HIS/JDS 225-J The Formation of the Judaic Heritage
HIS/JDS 226-F The Shaping of Modern Judaism
JDH 369-G Topics in Biblical Interpretation
KOR 346 Philosophy of Education in Korea and Japan
PHI 300 Ancient Philosophy
PHI 304-I Medieval Philosophy
PHI 336-G Philosophy of Religion
PHI 340-J Philosophical Traditions of East Asia
PHI 342-J History of Chinese Philosophy
PHI 344-J Japanese Thought and Philosophy

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RELIGIOUS STUDIES

SOC 264-J Introduction to Middle Eastern Society
SOC 352 Sociology of Religion

Appropriate special topics from these or other programs may also be offered to fulfill major requirements with permission of the major advisor.

Requirements for the Major in Religious Studies (RLS)

Attentive and personal advising is a primary commitment of the Religious Studies faculty, and students who enter the program are assigned to an individual advisor who will help them find the courses best suited to their area of interest in the major and make productive use of their electives outside the major and the general education requirements of the University. Students commonly complete minors or even second majors in related fields. Final approval of courses selected for major requirements should be obtained prior to registration for the senior year. Requirements for the major may be satisfied with RLS courses and, with advisor's approval, with courses from other programs listed under “Related Courses in Other Programs” above. Students wishing to satisfy the requirements with yet other courses may do so with the approval of the major advisor.

The major in Religious Studies leads to the Bachelor of Arts degree. All courses offered for the major must be passed with a letter grade of C or higher.

Completion of the major requires 30 credits.

A. Required Courses

RLS 301 Sources and Methods (ordinarily taken in the fall of the junior year; may be taken in the senior year by those who do not meet the prerequisites as juniors)

RLS 400 Religious Studies Seminar

B. Depth requirement

Four courses at the 200, 300, and 400 levels in one of the following areas of emphasis:

1. Buddhism
2. East Asian religions (Chinese, Japanese, and Korean religions)
3. Judaism (in coordination with Judaic studies; ordinarily all four courses in this area emphasis are JDS and JDH, but one may be replaced with a relevant RLS or other course with advisor's approval)
4. Christianity (to include at least one Judaic studies course; JDH/RLS 230 or JDS/HIS 225, 226 recommended)
5. Islam (may include one course in Judaism or Christianity; ARB 111, 112 may also count as one course for this area)
6. Theology, philosophy, and method in religion
7. Other areas, as available; these must be approved by the major advisor before the first semester of the senior year.

C. Breadth requirement

Four RLS courses in areas outside the area emphasis.

D. Upper-Division Writing Requirement

Majors are required to demonstrate a capability for expressing themselves effectively in writing. They should meet this requirement by taking RLS 301 before the end of their junior year and achieving a special overall rating of “satisfactory” on the written work in that course apart from the course grade. An overall rating of “unsatisfactory” necessitates remedial action. More detailed information about this requirement is available from the program.
The Honors Program in Religious Studies

Religious Studies majors who have maintained a grade point average of 3.50 in the major and 3.00 overall through their junior year may be invited to attempt the degree in Religious Studies with honors. The honors major requires a total of 36 credits, consisting of the 30 credits required for the major and six additional credits in a special research project pursued through both semesters of the senior year under the supervision of a member of the faculty, with registration in RLS 495-496.

When the supervising faculty member judges the student ready, an honors essay based on this special project is presented and defended at a meeting of the Religious Studies Seminar, which consists of the Religious Studies faculty and participating faculty from related disciplines. Thereafter, the Religious Studies faculty, together with at least one faculty member from another discipline who attended the seminar, meet to decide whether to recommend conferring the degree with honors. The decision is based on the student’s overall record, the recommendation of the special project supervisor, the student’s performance in presenting the honors essay, and the judgment of the faculty concerning its intrinsic worth.

Students who wish to become candidates for honors should consult with the program coordinator during their junior year. Faculty supervision of the senior honors project must be agreed upon and arranged before the end of the junior year.

Requirements for the Minor in Religious Studies (RLS)

The minor in Religious Studies consists of six courses (18 credits), at least three of which (nine credits) must be at the upper-division level. At least 12 credits, including RLS 301, must be taken for a letter grade. In addition to these general requirements, the program is designed to ensure: 1) an encounter with the variety of world religions; 2) a grasp of problems of method and the critical use of sources in the study of religion; and 3) sufficient depth in a single area emphasis to read advanced work in the area with experience and judgment. Requirements to meet these goals are:

1. RLS 101 or AAS/RLS 102
2. One 200-level RLS course
3. RLS 301
4. At least three courses in one of the area emphases listed for the major.

Students consult the program director by the semester in which they register for RLS 301 for advice on coordinating the Religious Studies minor with the student’s major program. Final approval of courses selected to meet the minor requirements should be obtained prior to registration for the senior year.