

Religious Studies

Website: religion.sewanee.edu

The study of religion is central to a liberal arts education and thus to the mission of the University of the South: to be liberally educated, Sewanee students ought to have a direct, critical encounter with religion and the most basic questions of meaning and purpose that religion addresses. Religion courses are designed to raise and reflect upon the central and abiding questions that challenge us all: What is the nature of religion? How does religion live in so many different and interesting ways in human culture? How do human beings throughout history express their deepest beliefs, concerns and faiths? Where do we find and how do we make sense of the Holy? What are our moral commitments and obligations? As citizens of the new millennium, how then shall we live in light of computers and in the shadow of concentration camps? From antiquity to postmodernity, China to Chattanooga, religion is to be encountered shaping human experience. At Sewanee, the Department of Religious Studies, students and faculty together, through formal classes, independent study, and co-curricular activities, investigate the role of religion and the many faces it presents.

Religion is not one field of study but many; by nature the study of religion is a multi-disciplinary effort that requires investigation of history, culture, values, sacred texts, theology, and philosophical thought. Such study requires familiarity with methods of historical analysis, literary criticism, phenomenological description, and cross-cultural, comparative study. For this reason the study of religion complements well other majors, the women's and gender studies minor, and curricular interests.

Faculty

Professors Brown (Chair), Parker, J. Smith

Associate Professor Thurman

Instructor M. Roberts

Major

Requirements for the Major in Religion

The major requires successful completion of the following:

Course Requirements ¹

RELG 301	Methodologies in Religious Studies	4
Select at least three courses in religion (RELG) united in theme ²		12
Select six additional courses in religion (RELG)		24
Total Semester Hours		40

Additional Requirements

A comprehensive examination

¹ A course outside the department also recommended for religion majors is HIST 298.

² Students are required to create a theme in conversation with their advisor. Some examples include religion and social power, religion and the environment, textual study in religion, and philosophical approaches to religion.

Honors

Departmental honors may be conferred on students considered worthy of distinction. Most of the following accomplishments are generally expected: 1) an average of at least B+ with no grade below a B- in religion courses; 2) a superior performance on the comprehensive examination; 3) a substantial essay or original project, usually as part of a 444 course, and oral defense or presentation of the work; 4) additional course work in religion beyond the minimum requirement, and carefully chosen elective courses in other fields complementing the student's work in religion; 5) ability to use a language other than English in the study of religion.

Minor

Requirements for the Minor in Religion

The minor requires successful completion of the following:

Course Requirements

Select at least six courses in religion (RELG) ¹	24
Total Semester Hours	24

¹ A grade average of C (2.00) or higher is required in these courses.

Courses

Religion Courses

RELG 103 Studying Islam (in the West) (4)

An introduction to the central methods and controversies involved in the academic study of Islam. The course focuses on the most frequently studied themes in Islamic intellectual and social histories, including major events, sectarian divides, intellectual traditions, and efforts to envision the place of Islam in the modern world. Attention is given to the methodological tensions caused by post-colonial critiques of the Western discipline of Islamic studies. Students engage in critical reflection on the place of Islam specifically and religion in general in contemporary social and political spheres.

RELG 104 The Many Faces of the *Qur'an* (4)

The *Qur'an* is the sacred text of Islam and one of the most influential books in human history. But to speak of the *Qur'an* as a "text" does not begin to address the numerous ways in which it is and has been perceived and experienced for many centuries. While the *Qur'an* is indeed contained in a physical book, it is also regarded as the eternal word of God, an oral tradition, an historical event, a body of words to be recited for worship, a moral message, a major cultural component of Islamic civilization, and a linguistic accomplishment. This course offers a survey of those different aspects of the *Qur'an*.

RELG 105 Faith After the Holocaust—Ethics, God, Humanity (4)

Investigation of religious faith in the light of the Holocaust. The course focus is on the deification of racism and nationalism in Christian Germany and the role of religion before and after the Shoah. Attention is given to historical, psychological and theological analysis. Students who complete this course may not receive credit for RELG 319.

RELG 109 Front Pages: Religion in the News (4)

This course relies upon online news and other sources to explore religion in global context. Class discussions are anchored in current religion news stories and in supporting documents related to those stories. *Open only to new first-year students and first-year students.*

RELG 111 Introduction to Religion (4)

An examination of the nature of religion as an aspect of universal human experience.

RELG 113 Disbelieving Religion (4)

What does it mean to "be religious"? What are the implications of deciding whether or not someone is religious based on whether she or he "believes in God"? What roles do rituals play in religious life? This course introduces basic categories of religious studies such as story, ritual, and experience by addressing these and other questions.

RELG 114 Religion Goes Pop (4)

An introduction to the critical study of religion through an examination of the relationship between religion and popular culture. Particular attention paid to the role of religion in popular culture and popular culture in religious life as well as examples of popular culture as a form of religious belief and practice. Emphasis placed on the variety of methodological approaches to the study of both religion and popular culture, including Marxist, feminist, and cultural studies, among others. Course aims to develop an informed and critical approach to both religion and popular culture as ways of making meaning in everyday life.

RELG 119 American Religious History: Contact, Exchange, Migration (4)

This course is a survey of American religious history, with a focus on the diversity of religions and religious people. The course considers religion in early America (Native American traditions, Judaism, Catholicism, Protestantism), new religions shaped in America (such as Mormonism, Christian Science, Spiritualism, New Thought), eastern religions brought to America (Eastern Orthodoxy, Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism), and present-day religious trends (from evangelicalism to New Age/new spirituality). Throughout, the course emphasizes how each religious path is shaped by its contact with others.

RELG 121 The Responsible Self (4)

Examination of the role of religion, reason and desire in the shaping of the form and content of ethical decision-making and action. Focus is upon major currents of Western ethical theory and Jewish, Christian and atheistic analyses of the self. Issues include moral authority and judgment and responsibility to self, other and community. Works include Hebrew Bible, Kant, Aristotle, H.R. Niehbuhr, Walter Wurzburger, James Cone and Laurie Zoloth-Dorfman.

RELG 122 Religion and Technology (4)

A history of western technology focusing on the religious relations and adjudications of specific technological innovations and mediating machinery. Case studies include clocks and calendars, movable type and paper, railroads, photography, phonographs and radio, automobiles, television and film, and the internet. In addition to examining particular technological forms and their impact on the world, the course considers the ways in which technology mediates how religion is manufactured and reproduced and, therefore, interrogates how and why the "religious" might be understood as connected to and descriptive of the relationship between humans and technologies.

RELG 141 Introduction to the Bible (4)

An examination of the origins, nature, and content of representative literature from the Old and New Testaments.

RELG 143 Introduction to the Bible I: Old Testament (4)

An examination of the origins, nature, and content of representative literature from the Hebrew Bible, the Christian Old Testament, and cognate literature. Attention is paid to issues of critical reading and theological interpretation of Jewish scriptures. Not open for credit to students who have completed RELG 141.

RELG 144 Introduction to the Bible II: New Testament (4)

An examination of the origins, nature, and content of representative literature from the New Testament and Hellenistic literature. Attention is paid to issues of critical reading and theological interpretation of Christian scripture.

RELG 151 Philosophy of Religion (4)

A philosophical examination of responses to questions about the ultimate nature and meaning of existence, such as the reality of God, the rational legitimacy of faith, the problem of evil. Not open to students who have taken RELG 251.

RELG 161 Comparative Religion (4)

An exploration of the forms of the sacred in American Indian religion, Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism, or other traditions. Not open to students who have taken RELG 261.

RELG 162 Introduction to Asian Religions (4)

An introduction to the major religious traditions of Asia: Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism, Daoism, and Shintoism and their views of reality and humanity. Not open for credit to students who have received credit for RELG 164.

RELG 164 Studying Asian Religions (in the West) (4)

An introduction to the central methods and controversies involved in the academic study of Asian religions. The course also focuses on the most frequently studied themes in Hindu, Buddhist, and Chinese religious intellectual and social histories, including major events, sectarian divides, people, intellectual traditions, and the practicing of Asian religions in the modern world. Attention will be paid to the methodological tensions caused by post-colonial critiques of Western representations of these religions. Not open for credit to students who have received credit for RELG 162.

RELG 201 The Spirit and Forms of Anglicanism (4)

A survey of the history, spirituality, cultures, and practices of church bodies within the international Anglican Communion, including the U.S. Episcopal Church. This course underscores the intellectual heritage of Anglicanism and its distinctive ecumenical role as via media between Protestant and Catholic traditions. Historical topics include the nineteenth-century Oxford Movement, Anglicanism's problematic relation to colonialism, its influence in developing nations, and its involvement in contemporary controversies. Special attention is also given to this tradition's cultural expressions in music, architecture, literature, and education. Not open for credit to students who have completed NOND 201.

RELG 209 Sharʿa: Threat or Utopia? (4)

Widely contested, the sharʿa (Islamic law) is a frequently misunderstood concept. Both academic and non-academic discourses often focus on specific rules, a reductive approach emphasizing practices that are foreign—“even threatening”—to modern audiences. Conversely, this course considers sharʿa as a broad system, highlighting its intellectual and moral underpinnings and exploring the origins of particular rules and practices within the social history of the pre-modern Muslim world.

RELG 210 How Muslims Think: Contemporary Muslim Philosophy (4)

Philosophy produced within the lands of Islam generally draws the attention of contemporary scholars to the extent that it fits into the general picture of medieval Western intellectual history. This course, by contrast, focuses on themes, trends, and tensions within the rarely studied philosophical traditions of the contemporary Muslim world. Among the topics addressed are considerations and crises that drive philosophical thought in the contemporary Muslim world, the intersection and tensions between secular and religious trends of thought, and the differences among philosophical traditions in major geographical parts of the Muslim world.

RELG 220 Holocaust, Religion, Morality (4)

An examination of the Holocaust from theological, historical and social psychological perspectives. Exploration of diverse religious and moral worldviews with particular attention to the ethical and unethical responses of victims, perpetrators and witnesses. What are the implications of the Holocaust for transformation of moral thought and behavior? Topics include cruelty, social conformity, altruism, forgiveness, survival and the function of conscience during and in the aftermath of atrocity. Authors include Emil Fackenheim, Elie Wiesel, Raul Hilberg, Christopher Browning, Primo Levi, Marion Kapland, Philip Hallie, and Lawrence Langer.

RELG 222 Gender and Sex in the New Testament (4)

An examination of how gender and sex are constructed in selected texts from the New Testament. Exploring the intersection of biblical studies and gender studies, this course incorporates the perspectives of feminist theory, masculinity studies, queer theory, and the history of sexuality. Focus is on situating biblical texts in the context of ancient Mediterranean cultures. Attention is also given to the influence of modern understandings of gender and sexuality on the interpretation of biblical texts and to the use of biblical texts in contemporary debates over gender roles and sexual practices. *Prerequisite: One course in religion, philosophy, or humanities.*

RELG 223 Feminist and Womanist Religious Ethics (4)

Examination of contemporary Jewish and Christian feminist and Black womanist ethics. Focus will be upon religious and non-religious ethical thought as it relates to the construction of gender identity, and the implications for an understanding of economic justice, racism, familial relations and gendered participation with religious traditions and theological communities. Authors include Katie Canon, Sharon Welch, Delores Williams, Judith Plaskow, Rachel Adler and Audre Lourde.

RELG 225 Introduction to Judaism (4)

Survey of Judaism and its emergence from Israelite Religion as evidenced in the Tanakh (Jewish Bible) into the Rabbinic culture of interpretation and Halakah (Jewish law). Approach is both historical and thematic. Focus is upon key periods of Judaism's development and the major ideas, movements, and practices central to ancient and modern Jewish life and thought. Attention is paid to the role of sacred Jewish texts and interpretation, community, covenant, and halakhic observance. Not open for credit to students who have completed RELG 120.

RELG 232 God and Empire: Biblical Texts and Colonial Contexts (4)

Examines the complex relation between The Bible and colonialism in the ancient and modern world. Exploring select texts from Old and New Testaments, this course incorporates the insights of postcolonial theory, transnational feminism, liberationist hermeneutics, and empire-critical biblical studies. Focus is on the changing contexts in which biblical texts were written and read, and on how texts both promoted and contested colonialism—with particular attention given to tensions between these two strands of biblical tradition throughout history. The course also considers early Jews and Christians as subaltern communities; the theological justification for European colonialism; and the appropriation of the Bible by indigenous peoples. *Prerequisite: One course in religion, philosophy, or humanities.*

RELG 243 Gospels (4)

An examination of the canonical and extracanonical gospel narratives with attention to their historical, literary and religious significance. Special attention given to the cultural production and reception of Gospels in art, film and drama.

RELG 262 Buddhist Traditions (4)

This course examines key Buddhist philosophical concepts and explores a diversity of traditions along with their historical contexts. Investigations of the ways these traditions are lived are elucidated by short biographies. Buddhist modernism is also considered using themes such as globalization, gender roles, science, commodification, and popular culture.

RELG 264 Hinduism (4)

An introduction to the main themes, philosophies, and myths as Hinduism has grown and changed for about 3,500 years.

RELG 301 Methodologies in Religious Studies (4)

This seminar examines the history and methodological development of the discipline of religious studies. After surveying the discipline's inception in textual studies in the late Enlightenment period, the course examines its connections to earlier theological traditions, and the branching out into sociological, hermeneutical, and phenomenological approaches in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The seminar aims to acquaint junior majors with the complexities involved in studying religious phenomena, as well as with the categories and frameworks that constitute the contemporary multi-disciplinary field of religious studies. *Open only to juniors pursuing programs in religion.*

RELG 304 The Ethics of Dialogue (4)

Examination of the religious and philosophical tradition of dialogical ethics. Focus will be on the classical, modern and contemporary understanding of the living speech within Jewish and Christian thought. In particular, attention given to existentialist, feminist and Levinasian ethical theory and their efforts to explain reciprocity, Divine-human and interhuman relationship, justice and duty. Authors include Plato, Martin Buber, H.R. Niebuhr, Gabriel Marcel, Emmanuel Levinas and Seyla Benhabib.

RELG 305 Religion and Animals (4)

In this course students examine human relationships with non-human animals through the lenses of Buddhism, Christianity, theories and methods in religious studies, and through reflection on their own lives. What roles have non-human animals played and do they play now in these religious traditions, in other aspects of culture, and in the lives of students themselves? How does having a body, an attribute that human and non-human animals share, relate to religion, its study, and human-animal relations? Students volunteer in animal-related groups (veterinarian offices, animal shelters, and farms, for example) as they find their own voices in this emerging interdisciplinary field.

RELG 307 Religious Environmentalism (4)

An exploration of the religious aspects of contemporary environmentalism and religious critiques of the emphasis by Americans on the values of consumerism and convenience. A service-learning component requires students to participate in a local environmental project and to reflect on both their own ethical commitments and those of the University.

RELG 308 Special Topics (2 or 4)

This course addresses topics related to the field of religious studies not addressed in other courses and is offered depending on interest. May be repeated when topic differs.

RELG 312 Matter and Spirit (4)

What do religious concepts such as flesh, nature, creation and spirit suggest for our understanding of body, mind, and matter? Conversely, what do new theories of mind, matter, and emotion suggest regarding these religious discourses and practices? How are agency, gender, politics, and the environment construed and lived in light of various paradigms of matter? Primary religious texts such as Augustine's *Confessions* and Spinoza's *Ethics* are examined in light of these questions.

RELG 313 The Word of God Across Traditions (4)

Each of the major Abrahamic religions incorporates the revelation of God's word to humans. The degree and nature of that revelation and what it means precisely differs greatly among religions, disciplines, trends of thought, and historical periods. This course addresses the ways in which God's word was understood in major Abrahamic religions, the implications of differences and overlaps in those understandings, and the importance of the conception of God as a speaking deity.

RELG 321 Christian Theological Paths (4)

An introduction to major theological figures in western Christian tradition prior to the 20th Century. Though content may vary, the course is likely to include the following: Aquinas, Luther, Schleiermacher.

RELG 324 Faith Seeking Foundations (4)

Involving readings in Western European Christian theology from the sixteenth through the mid-nineteenth centuries, this course focuses on Christian theological concerns and challenges related to the Reformation, the Enlightenment, and Romanticism. *Prerequisite: One course in religion, philosophy, or humanities.*

RELG 325 Kierkegaard Nietzsche: The Poetics of Existence (4)

Readings and reflections on the writings of Søren Kierkegaard and Friedrich Nietzsche. Emphasis is on literary and poetic aspects of their works, with further attention given to the interrelation between literary elements and the understandings of human existence reflected in the thought of both figures. Not open for credit to students who have completed RELG 330. *Prerequisite: One course in religion, philosophy, or humanities.*

RELG 332 Religion and Existence (4)

Reflection on the imagery and meaning of human selfhood within religious contexts and the traditions. *Prerequisite: One course in religion, philosophy, or humanities.*

RELG 333 Scripture, Story, and Ethics (4)

An examination of Jewish and Christian narrative as a vehicle for moral and religious reflection. Attention given to Jewish (Genesis, Exodus) and Christian (Gospel) foundation narratives from literary and hermeneutical perspectives associated with modern and postmodern writers and literary critics, including Zora Neale Hurston, Steiner, Alter, Auerbach, Kermode, Yosipovici, and Ferrucci. *Prerequisite: One course in religion, philosophy, or humanities.*

RELG 341 Religion and Ecology (4)

Considers the relationship between the natural and the sacred in selected traditions such as Amerindian religions, Hinduism, Buddhism, Daoism, Judaeo-Christian tradition, and contemporary eco-religion. Emphasizes analysis of latent ecological/environmental resources or conflicts in each tradition studied.

RELG 342 Mindfulness: East and West (4)

Through examination of early Buddhist texts, this course analyzes meditation as a religious practice, studying how the religious, ethical, bodily, and cognitive dimensions come together in the religious practice of early Buddhist meditation. Students examine mindfulness as it is now practiced and popularized in the United States, investigating the medicalization, psychologization, and marketing of mindfulness in particular. Those who desire first-hand experience with mindfulness meditation have the opportunity to be supported in this class for this exploration.

RELG 343 Popular Culture and Religion in America (4)

An examination of the religious forms implicit in selected aspects of American popular culture. Emphasis on interpreting theoretical studies and on critical analysis of typical examples.

RELG 344 Religion and Violence (4)

This course offers historical overviews and religious and theological analyses of religiously-mandated or justified violence within the context of the Jewish, Christian, and Islamic traditions. Also, this study evaluates how religious identity and sense of "vocation," both personal and communal, facilitate or impede religious violence.

RELG 346 Religion and Modernity (4)

A consideration of the impact of modernity on religion in the West; the crisis of belief and secular options.

RELG 348 Business of Religion (4)

This course explores the discursive connections between business and religion by examining their shared histories. Structured around a series of case studies from American religious historiography (e.g. Quaker Oats, Ivory Soap, Wal-Mart, Oprah), it considers how religious and business discourses can be understood as historically entangled and interpretatively contested ways to name and navigate the vexed relations of human exchange and culture-making, ritual purchase and systems of value, modes of production, and forms of authority. The course considers how religious institutions have engaged corporate concerns and how businesses might be and have been understood as religious subjects themselves in American history. *Prerequisite: One course in religion studies or one course with attribute G4 including AP or IB credit.*

RELG 350 Field Methods in Religious Studies (4)

A field-based seminar to examine the effects of religious belief and doctrine upon landscape and material culture in the upland South, including Appalachia. Core topics for different years vary and include Shaping the Land, Cemeteries, Log and Stone, Churches, and Village and Town. Field seminar. *Prerequisite: One course in religion, philosophy, or humanities.*

RELG 353 Buddhism and the Environment (4)

An investigation of Buddhist images, symbols, stories, doctrines, ethics, and practices as they relate to understanding the environment and humanity's relationship with it. Classical texts as well as modern commentaries by Buddhist teachers, writers and activists will be examined.

RELG 361 New Religions (4)

A comparative study of new religious movements of the 20th century including Japanese New Religions, selected cult phenomena, 'New Age' and spiritual movements, and new religions from South Asia and the Middle East. Some attention to North American quasi-religious movements such as occult spiritualism, religiously inspired political movements, and paramilitary religious movements.

RELG 364 Buddhist Ethics (4)

An introduction to the philosophy and practice of ethics in Buddhism beginning with an examination of *ahimsa*, the inviolability or sanctity of life. Attention will be paid to ethical beginnings with the birth of Buddhism (563 B.C.E.) and ending with modern Buddhist contributions to issues such as environmentalism.

RELG 368 Sacred Manhood (4)

A seminar devoted to examining sacral forms of masculine identity in selected religious traditions. Attention is given to the role of the shaman, medicine man, priest, hunter, sacred warrior, heroic wanderer, and priest-king. Includes examination of ritual forms such as sacral mutilation, animal totemism, sacrifice, vision quests, and passage rites. Close reading of primary texts and critical secondary literature. *Prerequisite: One course in religion, philosophy, or humanities.*

RELG 374 Anglicanism 1350-1662 (4)

A study of significant thinkers and events in the formation of the Anglican tradition from the English Reformation to the English Civil War and Restoration. Attention also given to the pre-Reformation development of religious thought and practice in England. Writers from Thomas Cranmer to the Caroline Divines will be considered in the contexts both of English and European history and of the intellectual currents of the period.

RELG 391 Southern Religion (4)

An historical and comparative analysis of the religious traditions of the Southeastern United States with particular reference to the interactions between these traditions with the social, political, and economic culture of the region.

RELG 393 Rural Religion (4)

A study of the religious forms of rural society with special emphasis upon the rural church in the southeastern United States. Attention to historical, social, cultural, and demographic transformations of rural institutions from 1800 to the present. Fieldwork required.

RELG 395 Appalachian Religion (4)

An examination of typical forms of religion in Appalachia with respect to the origin, development, diffusion, and transformation of these religious forms from the era of the Great Awakening to the twentieth century. Comparative consideration of the distinctive denominational forms of religion along with the trans-denominational cultural forms—including hymnody, sermon, folk music, and ritual practice—distributed across the core Appalachian area. Some consideration given to the "Appalachian Diaspora" and the transport of Appalachian religious practices beyond the core area. A fieldwork component considers the expression of Appalachian Religion in material culture.

RELG 444 Independent Study (2 or 4)

For selected students. May be repeated indefinitely. *Prerequisite: Professor consent and prerequisite override required.*

RELG 496 History and Religion in Medieval Europe (4)

This course covers the history of Europe during the Middle Ages, roughly 500-1500 A.D. It also introduces students to the rise of Christianity as a world religion within the Roman Empire, leading to its eventual domination in Western Europe, and to its interaction with medieval Judaism and emerging Islam. The course combines the study of religion with that of history, precisely because one of the features of the Middle Ages was the centrality of religion to politics, society, and culture. The study of primary sources, including, among others, the writings of Sidonius Apollinaris, Rabia of Basra, Bede, Einhard, Hildegard of Bingen, Thomas Aquinas, Christine de Pisan and Petrarch, underpin the structure of the course.