Religious Studies

Website: Religious Studies (https://new.sewanee.edu/programs-of-study/religious-studies/)

Religious Studies at Sewanee is dedicated to the study of religion as a critical component of social making, historical construction, and systems of valuation. Faculty in the department bring to the classroom and to their scholarship an array of theoretical, methodological, and empirical expertise across a variety of geographies, chronologies, economies, and traditions. From antiquity to postmodernity, China to Chattanooga, students in the Religious Studies Department interrogate religion as an analytical category, a colonial construction, an anthropological observation, an institutional formation, and a hermeneutic of hegemony and resistance. Many disciplines and fields of study in the liberal arts press students toward critical thinking and self-reflection. The study of religion contributes to this endeavor through a focused effort to understand and critique the roles and relations of religion relative to textual traditions, institutional organizations, sensory cultures, and practices of mediation, classification, and contestation. No study of religion is complete without a serious wrestling with its implications in the intimate histories and cultures of atrocity, imperialism, resistance, and indifference. Coursework in this department challenges students to confront and reconsider these associations and the consequences thereof.

Religious studies is not a monolithic field of study but is instead constituted in its interdisciplinary reach--from language study, philosophical investigation, and textual analysis to sociological comparison, archival research, ethnographic fieldwork, and beyond. For this reason, the study of religion complements and contributes to many other fields of study, and students regularly combine their studies of religion with those of other departments, including majors and minors across the humanities and social and natural sciences and in connection with co-curricular activities and undertakings. It should be noted that the Department of Religious Studies orients on the academic study of religion and does not endorse, promote, or advance any particular religious tradition, instead investigating such promotions as part of the varied data available to scholars and students of religion for continued analysis and critique. We will not study religion in a sanitized and sanctified manner but rather as we find it: on the ground, airwaves, websites, mosques, classrooms, voting booths, foxholes, monasteries, and every other location and realm in which it is entangled.

Faculty

Professors: Holloway, Parker

Associate Professors: Curts (Chair), Thurman

Assistant Professor: Bhattacharjee

Major

Requirements for the Major in Religious Studies

The major requires successful completion of the following:

Code	Title	Semester Hours
Course Requirements		
RELG 301	Methodologies in Religious Studies [1]	4
RELG 401	Religion in Public	4
Select at least three courses in Religious Studies (RELG) that define a thematic concentration. Selection is done as part of the comprehensive exam process.		12
Select six additional courses in religious studies (RELG)		24
Total Semester Hours		**44**

Code	Title	Semester Hours
Additional Requirements		
A comprehensive examination [2]		

1

This course satisfies the major writing intensive requirement.

[2]

Students must complete a two-part comprehensive examination. The first part consists of a written exam based largely, though not exclusively, on materials from prior RELG courses, especially RELG 301. The second part consists of a public presentation of a project based on the student's thematic concentration, which is defined in conversation with department faculty. Students will take RELG 401 to help prepare for both parts of the comprehensive exam.

Honors

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

Student Learning Outcomes

A student majoring in Religious Studies will

1. Explain the field of religious studies as the interrogation of the category "religion."
2. Explain and appraise current debates about the definition of religion and the range of critical theories and methodologies used in the field.
3. Explain the role of religion across historical periods, geographical locations, and cultural traditions.
4. Develop and evaluate their own approach to the definition and study of religion, especially through independent research.
5. Be able to articulate orally and in writing their knowledge of Religious Studies.

Minor

Requirements for the Minor in Religious Studies

The minor requires successful completion of the following:

Code	Title	Semester Hours
Course Requirements		
Select at least six courses in religious studies (RELG) [1]		24
Total Semester Hours		**24**

[1]

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

Courses

Religious Studies 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 108 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. Prerequisites vary with topic. This course may be repeated for credit when the topic differs.

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 118 Climate, Kith and Kin (4)
Through the lens of sociology of religion, this course examines contemporary religious and social movements and kin-formation in a time of climate-change disruption such as Mormon family prepping, eco-poetics, dominionism, eco-communalism, survivalist culture, climate migration, and Extinction Rebellion. In what ways are the social, political, and economic reverberations of climate breakdown affecting the social imaginary? In light of ongoing perturbations of Earth-system stability, how are notions and practices of kinship and communal belonging being reconfigured?.

RELG 119 Rediscovering America, Reconsidering Religion (4)
An introduction to and critical interrogation of what counts as "America" and "religion." It asks how these terms have been defined and debated and to what effect. This course examines select moments, figures, debates, and movements from colonial encounter to the present that have helped form and reshape these concepts (religion, America/n), particularly as they intersect with other categories of human distinction and difference-making, including race, space, gender, sex, and class.

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 123 Memory of Ruin: Shoah and Nakba (4)
This course examines religious narratives of collective traumas: Jewish representations of the Shoah and Islamic and Christian representations of the Palestinian Nakba. Comparatively, how are discourses of loss and redemption coded within the symbolic universes of these historically-related religious traditions and deployed in the sacralized politics of memorialization and remembrance? What is the symbiotic relation between conflicting narratives of victimization, imbued with religious meaning, and the historical and contemporary situation in Israel and Palestine?.

RELG 132 Matthew's Gospel and the Moral Self (4)
A critical exploration of the gospel of Matthew as a prompt to moral self-reflection and possible guide to a meaningful life. Primary focus on the Sermon on Mount throughout the course. Historical, literary, and philosophical methods facilitate close reading and engagement with key interpretive issues and debates. Practical experiments in moral thinking and acting based on the biblical text and biblical reception history facilitate reflection on the place of virtue in a meaningful life. No prior knowledge of the Bible or commitment to a religious tradition assumed.

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. Not open for credit to students who have completed RELG 141.

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 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 165 A Buddhist Life (4)
More and more people in the USA know something about Buddhism, but what is it? What does it encourage people to do? How? This course is organized around the Eightfold Noble Path, exploring Buddhist ethics and ritual, psychology, and cultivation practices such as meditation. Students will learn about the people, teachings, and institutions of Buddhism. The class will focus on Theravada Buddhism, exploring it historically, philosophically, and anthropologically. Special focus will be placed on matters of gender and race. Some sessions will be dedicated to exploring different Buddhist meditative approaches.

RELG 167 Thinking with Buddhists (4)
This course explores Buddhist contributions to global conversations on poverty, environment, racism, capitalism, and gender. The central questions examined will be: what should the world look like and how do Buddhists engage to make that vision a reality?.

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 207 Religion and the Environment (4)
Religious practices shape society, including our understanding of the environment. Simultaneously, the environment shapes our religious sensibilities. This course investigates the close relationship between religion and place as well as communities and the environment. Specifically, students explore how religions change to address new problems, examine the relationship between society's treatment of the environment and women and ecofeminist responses, and investigate the interplay of new ethical systems with ancient texts. *Prerequisite: Open only to students admitted to the Lake Tahoe Semester program..*

RELG 209 Shari'a: Threat or Utopia? (4)
Widely contested, the shari'a (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 shari'a 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 211 Sensational Religion (4)
How does religion make sense? How do we make sense of religion? Drawing on the rich array of meanings evoked by the word "sense," this course introduces and examines these "sensational" dilemmas. Drawing on a variety of case studies in the sensory cultures of religion, it explores how religious images, artifacts, practices, and spaces are historically connected to and help reproduce a dynamic human sensorium, and it investigates religion as a sensual practice, as a sensationalized contention, and as a category through which humans endeavor to make sense--of themselves and of the 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 Browing, 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 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 229 Death, Dying, and Grief (4)
This class examines how death, dying, and grief are ritualized and understood in different cultures. Exploration will also be made of current challenges, personal and societal, related to death such as advance directives (living wills), grief, hospice care, mortuary services, and bodily disposal. Attention will be paid to eco-death and issues of social justice related to death, too. Students will engage in a semester-long community- based project.

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 235 Cult Controversies: Race, Gender, and Sex in America's 'Alternative' Religions (4)
Introduces and explores new religious movements, sectarian spin-offs, and alternative communities in the U.S. that have tested the parameters of acceptable "religion" at different moments in history. Particular attention is given to intersectional dynamics. The class questions the politics and practices of labeling, especially the language of "cults," and centers on specific historical case studies in order to illustrate and analyze major theoretical and methodological challenges in and for the study of religion(s). It considers what draws people to create and join new religious movements, the distinctive worlds such groups endeavor to build, and the controversies that have historically attended them.

RELG 243 Gospels (4)
An examination of early Christian gospels, canonical and extracanonical, with attention to their historical background, literary features, religious significance, and cultural reception. Special attention given to the adaptation and appropriation of the gospels in art, film, literature, philosophy, politics, and popular culture.

RELG 244 Paul and His Interpreters (4)
An examination of the letters of the Apostle Paul in their cultural and social-historical contexts. Attention is paid to Paul's religious thought and the reception of his writings in emergent Christianity.

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 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 religious studies.*

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. Niehbuhr, 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. This course may be repeated for credit when the topic differs. *Prerequisite: Prerequisites vary by topic..*

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 323 Engendering Religion (4)
Draws on an archive of American religion and culture to study gender and religion with an intersectional eye toward historical and contemporary dynamics of power. Introduces students to feminist, womanist, transgender, and queer scholarship in study of religion. *Prerequisite: At least one course in either RELG or WMST.*

RELG 335 Reading Race and the Bible (4)
This seminar explores the ways concepts of "race," "religion," and "scripture" have mutually constituted each other over the course of modern European and American history. The course pays particular attention to the central, and sometimes hidden, role "the Bible" has played in the racial formation of citizens and subjects. To that end, the course draws upon several different disciplines and fields, including but not limited to: critical race theory, intersectional feminism, postcolonial theory, liberation hermeneutics, American religious history, and critical biblical studies. The course's overarching goal is to critically understand how “race” shaped and shapes interpretations of biblical texts as scripture and how the scriptural framing of racial categories imbues social hierarchies with religious authority. *Prerequisite: One course in religious studies.*

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 344 Sacralized Violence (4)
The course examines the dynamics of violence as it is engendered and enacted in human collectivities, be they religious, ethnic, or political. The course covers theoretical analyses of social violence and historical instantiations of the social processes by which victims are targeted and attacked. We focus on violent movements in religious traditions and the manner in which religious warrants, discourse, texts, and practices are marshaled in the sacralization of a campaign of atrocity against an enemy perceived as a profane threat to the perpetrating society. Attention is also given to practical means of impeding and interfering in the dynamics of sacralized 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.

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 Greening Buddhism (4)
Through examination of Buddhist writings and practices and using the Buddhist framework of the four truths, this class explores the interrelationships of humanity and environmental sufferings, their causes, their ends, and the ways to their ends. Readings will be supplemented by class experiments that invite students to reflect deeply on their own experiences of and relationships with the world and its environmental challenges.

RELG 360 Religious Freedom (4)
A study of "religious freedom" discourse, its histories, and political consequences. Readings emphasize case law in the U.S., though with an eye to its comparative context, as well as the theoretical and methodological questions that studies of "religious freedom" offer the broader study of religion. *Prerequisite: One course in religious studies.*

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 401 Religion in Public (4)
An advanced capstone seminar for seniors preparing for their comprehensive exams. *Prerequisite: RELG 301.*

RELG 444 Independent Study (2 or 4)
For selected students. This course may be repeated for credit when the topic differs. *Prerequisite: Instructor prerequisite override required.*