Religious Studies

PROFESSOR: Darla Schumm (John P. Wheeler Professor of Religious Studies; coordinator, religious studies; chair, global politics & societies)

AFFILIATED FACULTY: James Patrick Downey (philosophy), Michael E. Gettings (philosophy)

VISITING LECTURER: Kelly Derrick (adjunct)

The religious studies major allows students to engage religious issues with other disciplines in the Global Politics and Societies (GPS) department: International Studies, Political Science, and Sociology. The shape of the religion major offers critical understandings of religion as community and individual enterprise, especially as religion relates to other human endeavors in GPS and other allied fields. Its focus is in the world’s major religions, their rituals, beliefs, texts, and ethical systems, as well as the various social, political, and cultural contexts that shape, and are in turn shaped by, religious communities and beliefs.

The religious studies major provides excellent training in cultural literacy. It offers a broad background for graduate school in religious studies, ministerial studies, international studies, or programs in other allied fields. Its broadest appeal will be to those who wish to understand religious community and spirituality in their incarnations across many disciplines and cultures.

REQUIREMENTS FOR A MAJOR IN RELIGIOUS STUDIES:
11 courses (42 credits)

CORE COURSES:
- REL 126: Introduction to Religion in a Global Context (4)
- Two of the following:
  - REL 212: Christian Traditions (4)
  - REL 217: Islamic Traditions (4)
  - REL 218: Buddhist Traditions (4)
  - REL 219: Jewish Traditions (4)
- REL 340: Theories of Religion (4)
- GPS 214: Qualitative Methods (4) or GPS 216: Research Methods in Social Sciences (4)
- GPS 470: Senior Seminar (2)
- GPS 480: Senior Thesis (4) or an Internship (4)

ELECTIVE COURSES:
- Two additional 200 or 300 level Religious Studies courses (8)
- Two courses from one of the other GPS programs of study (International Studies, Political Science, Sociology), one at the 100-level and one at the 200 or 300 level (8)

COURSES IN RELIGIOUS STUDIES:

REL 117: INTRODUCTION TO THE HEBREW BIBLE (4) Derrick
A Biblical study of the identity, faith, and history of Israel through a survey of drama, story, and event. This course broadly samples the law, prophets, and writings, in view of histories of interpretation, ritual, practices, and symbol systems. In addition, the course will provide an introduction to methods of exegesis, and to historical and literary criticism. Open to first-year students. No prerequisite. Offered Term 1. (f, w, PRE)

REL 118: INTRODUCTION TO THE NEW TESTAMENT (4) Derrick
A survey of the early Christian writings and their interpretation. This course explores selected gospels, epistles, and writings in their historical context. Attention is paid to the development of historical Christian identity and community, liturgical practices and symbols, major themes, as well as to the history of interpretation of New Testament texts. The course also provides an introduction to exegesis, and to historical and literary criticism. Open to first-year students. No prerequisite. Not offered in 2017-18. (f, w, x, DIV, PRE)

REL 126: INTRODUCTION TO RELIGION IN A GLOBAL CONTEXT (4) Schumm
Does religion matter? A brief scan of world events tells us that it does. This course introduces students to the study of religion in its cultural and historical contexts. It aims to familiarize students with the multi-faceted role of religion in the world including examination of social, economic, historical, political, and ethical factors. Open to first-year students. No prerequisite. Offered Term 1. (f, w, x, GLO)
REL 130: JESUS AND MARY MAGDALENE IN LITERATURE AND FILM (4) Schumm
The figures of Jesus of Nazareth and Mary Magdalene have captured the imagination of artists, writers, and filmmakers. Because the gospel accounts differ from one another and leave many questions unanswered regarding these two figures, the subsequent portrayals of them vary widely. This course will explore some of these portrayals in modern literature and film, sampling such artists as Paul Park, Denys Arcand, and Pier Paolo Passolini. Open to first-year students. Offered Term 2. (w, x, MOD)

REL 140: DISABILITY, RELIGION AND ETHICS (4) Schumm
Religious teachings and practices help to establish cultural standards for what is deemed "normal" human physical and mental behavior and to establish a moral order for the healthy body and mind. Religion also plays an important role in determining how persons with disabilities are treated or mistreated in a given historical cultural context. Thus, this class will critically examine how religions represent, theologize, theorize, and respond to disability. Open to first-year students. Not offered in 2017-18. (DIV)

The separation of church (faith) and state (politics) is a foundational principle for most liberal democracies around the world. But, as Mahatma Gandhi once said, “Those who say religion has nothing to do with politics do not know what religion is.” Politicians in the United States routinely discuss their religious faith publicly and attend rallies and fundraisers supported by religious organizations. How do politicians negotiate the tenets of their own faith while attending to the needs of a multicultural and interfaith constituency? As (post) modern societies, have we truly abandoned our moral and religious principles in favor of a cultural and social politics that is relativistic, or is the exact opposite of this more correct, suggesting that open integrations of faith and religion are actually more common? In this course, we will ask many of these philosophical questions while we examine practical case studies of the intersections and interactions between religion and political life. Students, working in both group and individual projects, will follow political issues in the United States and worldwide where religion is a major issue in the daily life of its citizens. In addition to US case studies on evangelical voting and Islamophobia in American politics, additional case studies examine contemporary and historical issues of religion and politics in Europe, North Africa, and Latin American. We intend the course to be a critical space where we examine these controversial issues in a safe and accepting environment where we can learn from the different perspectives and experiences of our colleagues. Also listed as INTL 197F. Open to first-year students only. Placement to be determined during the summer. Offered Term 1. (o, r)

REL 212: CHRISTIAN TRADITIONS (4) Derrick
The many sects of Christianity have repeatedly attempted to reinterpret the origins of the tradition in ways which provide a new or “reformed” framework for a community. The course examines not only the history of early Christianity, but also a selection of such reinterpretations and of Christians’ responses to other cultures with whom they coexist. Prerequisite: REL 117, or REL 118 recommended. Not offered in 2017-18. (o, DIV, MOD)

REL 215: WOMEN IN JUDAISM, CHRISTIANITY, AND ISLAM (4) Derrick
This course involves a critical analysis of women, sex, and gender issues in the religious traditions of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. We examine the androcentric history of each monotheistic tradition. Although the principal focus of this course is not comparative in design, we discuss similarities and differences between the experiences of women in these religions in the modern contexts. Also listed as GWS 216. No prerequisite. Offered Term 2. (DIV, MOD)

REL 217: ISLAMIC TRADITIONS (4) Schumm
The early community of Muslims at Medina is explicitly understood to be a model for the ideal Islamic polity. Struggles to define the relationship between religious and political leadership and community in these early years established problems and precedents that remain issues in Islam even today. The course examines the early community and follows some of these issues of Islamic self-identity into the present. Open to first-year students. Not offered in 2017-18. (o, GLO, PRE)

REL 218: BUDDHIST TRADITIONS (4) Schumm
This class is both an introduction to Buddhism as well as an investigation of how Buddhist teachings, symbols, stories, doctrines, ethics, and practices inform human understanding and engagement with the environment and the natural world. Topics discussed in class fall into two primary categories: a basic introduction to Buddhism, and an exploration of Buddhism and ecology. Open to first-year students. Offered Term 2. (o, GLO, MOD)
REL 219: JEWISH TRADITIONS (4) Schumm
Through the lens of the foundational communities in Palestine and the diaspora, we will view some of the basic issues in the definition of Jewish self-identity: exile and return, sacrifice and study, cultural assimilation, and the physical and spiritual “lands” of Israel. Prerequisite: REL 117 recommended. Not offered in 2017-18. (o, DIV, MOD)

REL 223: WOMEN IN BUDDHISM (4) Schumm
This course critically examines the role, status, and contributions of women throughout Buddhist history. Students examine the role women played in the formation of Buddhism and how significant texts, important teachings, and influential figures portray women. Students explore how modern female practitioners understand their contributions to the tradition and how the role of women differs within various branches of Buddhism. Also listed as GWS 223. Not offered in 2017-18. (r, GLO)

REL 237: RELIGION AND GLOBAL POLITICS (4) Schwarz
This course uses a critical lens to explore religion in global politics. Students will examine and analyze a range of topics, including the compatibility of religion with democracy, issues of gender in religion and politics, the politics of religious freedom, religious humanitarianism and development, and religion and politics in the public sphere. We will problematize our assumptions about "religion," "secularism," and "politics" and strive to move beyond common misperceptions about Christianity, Islam, Judaism, and other religions, and the roles they play in global politics. Instead of treating religious traditions and communities as static entities, we will view religions as "lived" - paying attention to the historical, social, and cultural contextual factors that shape religious actors and their political actions. Students will develop their understandings of how diverse religious, political, and cultural communities conceptualize and act on a range of religious and political issues. Students will learn to think critically about religion and global politics and present a clear and cogent argument on a related theme. Also listed as INTL/POLS 237. Offered Term 1. (w, x, MOD)

REL 241: SOCIOLOGY OF RELIGION (4) Department
This course analyzes religion as it relates to a range of social identities. We begin with a discussion of sociological theories of religion through which we will consider trends within religious practice, the purposes and effects of religion, and the intersection of religion and other social structures. The class will then consider these theories in empirical contexts. Also listed at SOC 241. Not offered in 2017-18. (DIV)

REL 250: SPECIAL TOPIC: SACRED STORY: SCRIPTURES OF THE WORLD’S RELIGIONS (4) Derrick
This class is a survey of the major world religions through the voices of their sacred stories. We will consider how religious traditions understand and use their sacred texts – an exciting challenge since the meaning of these texts is not always clear. The course provides an opportunity to dig deeper into the texts, with the help of modern interpretation, to discover the richness of these religious writings and the faiths which inspired them. No prerequisite. Open to first-year students. Offered Term 1. (f, w, x, PRE)

REL 250: SPECIAL TOPIC: RELIGION AND DISABILITY (4) Schumm
This course explores the powerful intersections between religion and disability in sacred texts, religious doctrine, popular culture, and lived experience. We will probe questions such as: What does it mean to be human? Why are some bodies deemed more worthy than others? How are ideas of normal and abnormal constructed and reinforced? Does religion promote or hinder disability justice? Also listed as GWS 250. Offered Term 2.

REL 272: PHILOSOPHY OF RELIGION (4) Downey
Also listed and described as PHIL 272. Offered Term 2.

REL 290: INDEPENDENT STUDY (2 or 4) Department
Independent study conducted below the advanced level. Application must be made with faculty prior to registration. Offered any term.

REL 318: SEXUAL ETHICS (4) Schumm
What is “good” sex? How is sexual deviance determined and defined? How do constructions of sexuality differ across cultures? This class explores the intersections between sexuality, religion, and ethics. We will examine the roles race, class, and gender play in the construction and understanding of sexuality. Also listed as GWS 318. Prerequisite: junior standing. Not offered in 2017-18. (o, DIV)

REL 327: EARLY CHRISTIANITY (4) Leedom
Also listed and described as HIST 327. Prerequisite: sophomore standing or permission of the instructor. Not offered in 2017-18. (PRE)
REL 340: THEORIES OF RELIGION (4)  Schumm
This course examines the historical development and modern understanding of the academic study of religion. The focus of our inquiry will be the problems of methodology implicit in the study of religion. The course draws upon a variety of disciplines whose methods have built the secular study of religion, including anthropology, sociology, literary criticism, feminist theory, and ritual theory. We examine traditional as well as alternative methodological approaches, including perspectives that attend to issues of race, gender, and class. We’ll read and discuss concrete examples of how these various theories and methods are applied when studying the world’s major religious traditions. Prerequisite: two religion courses, one at the 200 level. Not offered in 2017-18.

REL 362: SPIRITUAL ACTIVISM (4)  Costa
Also listed and described as GWS 362. Prerequisite: sophomore standing or permission. Offered Term 2. (DIV)

REL 371: RELIGION, GENDER, AND PEACEBUILDING (4)  Schwarz
This course examines the relationship between religion, conflict, and peacebuilding through the lens of gender. Employing feminist approaches to security, peace, and religion, which prioritize the experiences of women and other marginalized groups, students will critically analyze discourses portraying religion as inherently antithetical to women’s empowerment, and women as particularly vulnerable in conflict or uniquely qualified peacebuilders. Also listed as INTL/POLS 371. Not offered in 2017-18.

REL 390: INDEPENDENT STUDY (2 or 4)  Department
Independent study conducted at the advanced level. Application must be made with faculty prior to registration. Offered both terms.

REL 399: INTERNSHIP (4)  Department
Application must be made with faculty prior to registration. May be proposed in any term.

REL 490: SENIOR HONORS THESIS (4, 4)  Department
Senior religious studies majors with strong academic records may apply to work for honors recognition by presenting a thesis proposal to the faculty of the department. This project is completed over Fall, Short, and Spring Terms. Prerequisite: senior religious studies major. Application with faculty must be made prior to registration.