

Religious Studies, Catalog 2025-26

MINOR

- **PROFESSOR:** Darla Schumm (coordinator, religious studies)
- **AFFILIATED FACULTY:** James Patrick Downey (philosophy), Edward A. Lynch (political science), Michael E. Gettings (philosophy)
- **ASSISTANT PROFESSOR:** Ashleigh Breske
- **VISITING ASSISTANT PROFESSOR:** Marwood Larson-Harris

The religious studies minor 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 minor 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 on 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 minor 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 MINOR IN RELIGIOUS STUDIES:

5 courses (20 credits)

- Rel 126: Introduction to Religion in a Global Context, 4 credits
- Two 200- or 300-level Religion courses, 8 credits
- One 200- or 300-level course from another GPS department (political science, sociology or international studies), 4 credits
- GPS 475: Social Justice Capstone, 4 credits

COURSES IN RELIGIOUS STUDIES:

REL 126: INTRODUCTION TO RELIGION IN A GLOBAL CONTEXT (4)

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 201: INTRODUCTION TO THE HEBREW BIBLE (4)

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 202: INTRODUCTION TO THE NEW TESTAMENT (4)

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. Offered Term 2. (f, w, x, DIV, PRE)

REL 212: CHRISTIAN TRADITIONS (4)

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. Open to first-year students. Offered Term 1. (o, DIV, MOD)

REL 217: ISLAM AND THE WEST (4)

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. Offered Term 2. (o, GLO, PRE)

REL 218: BUDDHIST TRADITIONS (4)

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. (o, GLO, MOD)

REL 219: JEWISH TRADITIONS (4)

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. Open to first-year students. (o, DIV, MOD)

REL 241: SOCIOLOGY OF RELIGION (4)

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 and described as SOC 241. (DIV)

REL 250: RELIGION AND POLITICS (4)

In America’s tradition, religion and politics are supposed to be separate. But is this separation really possible in practice? If not, what impact will religion have on people as they seek power? What will the lure of power do to people as they seek ultimate meaning in their lives? The course will have a strong focus on the Abrahamic religions (Judaism, Christianity, Islam) but will include texts from non-Western religions. Attempts to fuse religion and politics, such as Liberation Theology, Christian Democracy, and political Islam will round out the course. Also listed and described as POLS 250.

REL 270: SACRED STORY: WORLD SCRIPTURES (4)

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. Open to first years. No Prerequisite. Offered Term 2. (f, w, x, PRE)

REL 272: PHILOSOPHY OF RELIGION (4)

Also listed and described as PHIL 272. Offered Term 1.

REL 290: INDEPENDENT STUDY (2 OR 4)

Independent study conducted below the advanced level. Application must be made with faculty prior to registration. Offered any term.

REL 335: MILTON (4)

An analysis of Paradise Lost. We will use close readings of the poem's language, structure, and themes to understand Milton's epic as a literary masterpiece; we will consider literary responses to the poem as a means of determining the epic's cultural significance. Also listed and described as ENG 335. Prerequisite: junior standing or permission. Offered Term 2. (w, x, o)

REL 362: SPIRITUAL ACTIVISM (4)

Also listed and described as GWS 362. Prerequisite: sophomore standing or permission. (DIV)

REL 390: INDEPENDENT STUDY (2 OR 4)

Independent study conducted at the advanced level. Application must be made with faculty prior to registration. Offered both terms.

REL 399: INTERNSHIP (4)

Application must be made with faculty prior to registration. May be proposed in any term.