

# RELIGIOUS STUDIES (REL)

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Studying religion at Guilford is an inherently interdisciplinary endeavor that takes the individual student as its starting point in order to draw forth each student's creative, critical and ethical energies. Our pedagogical approach supports and challenges a diverse group of student learners on a wide range of topics that examine religion's impact on local, national and global communities. In true liberal-arts form, our methodological approaches include the theological, comparative, philosophical, historical, ethical, literary, scriptural, psychological, socioeconomic and anthropological. In order to give students the knowledge and tools necessary for global citizenship, our faculty offer courses on Christianity, the Bible, Judaism, Islam, Native American religion, Tibetan and Himalayan religions, and Chinese religions.

Religious Studies as an academic discipline and as practiced in our department fits beautifully with Guilford College's mission and Core Values. We teach Religious Studies not as an isolated, esoteric field of study, but rather as a deeply integrated field requiring an invaluable tool set that merges elegantly with other academic disciplines, from the humanities and social sciences to the arts and hard sciences. Our curriculum transforms students (by opening their hearts and minds to new and expansive ideas) while preparing them for a variety of careers (such as law, medicine, education, ministry, social justice work, counseling, art, business and government) by nurturing in students a range of skills (such as critical and creative thinking, competency in oral communication, confidence reading a range of texts, and leadership and role modeling within communities).

Learning Goals: Skills, Self and Society

Our learning objectives focus on student development in terms of skills, the self and society. To that end, students pursuing Religious Studies will:

- hone critical reflection through different interpretive perspectives (historical, theological, anthropological and ideological) applied to a range of religious phenomena including religious figures, movements, texts, rituals and cultural expressions
- conduct and present research in various written and oral forms
- locate themselves within historical, social, and cultural contexts so that they can articulate their own values and views, listen to and learn from others' perspectives, and act knowledgably and responsibly in a global society
- receive a solid foundation for careers that emphasize critical thinking, close-reading, strong written and oral communication, analysis, and a robust understanding of human belief and behavior
- engage critically, compassionately and cross-culturally with the major issues facing individuals, cultures and the world Courses are offered at different levels, each of which has specific expectations and goals. The 100-level courses are introductory, designed for first-year and sophomore non-majors. They are accessible to entering first-year students.

The 200-level courses are advanced introductory courses that function as core courses for the major. They are designed to serve as initial courses

in the department for sophomores, juniors, seniors and for beginning majors. Majors normally take several courses at this level.

The 300-level courses are designed for majors and for upper-level students with a strong interest in the subject matter and a background in the humanities. 300-level courses are designed primarily for majors and assume at least one course in religious studies. Courses are usually offered in a seminar format that requires active participation by all class members. Majors should have several 300-level courses.

The 400-level courses are small seminars that usually examine one or a few thinkers or issues in depth. They are designed for advanced majors or, by permission, exceptionally interested and qualified non-majors.

## Degree Offered

The Bachelor of Arts degree is offered in religious studies.

- Religious Studies Major (<https://catalog.guilford.edu/catalog/academic-departments-majors/religious-studies/religious-studies/>)
- Quaker Studies Minor (<https://catalog.guilford.edu/catalog/academic-departments-majors/religious-studies/quaker-studies-minor/>)
- Religious Studies Minor (<https://catalog.guilford.edu/catalog/academic-departments-majors/religious-studies/religious-studies-minor/>)

### REL 100. Religion, Dreams and the Dreaming. 4.

This cross-cultural course will consider the religious role of the dream as initiatory experience, metaphor for aboriginal time, gateway to the other world, venue for the divine guide, healing event, "royal road" to the unconscious, and prophetic harbinger of the personal or collective future. This is an introductory course, and no previous academic experience in religious studies is expected or required. Fulfills humanities requirement (1998). Arts/ humanities requirement (2019).

### REL 101. History of Religion in United States. 4.

Exploration of the interaction of American religion and culture. Examines aspects of the religious traditions of Native Americans, African Americans, Roman Catholics, Jews and Protestants and the shift from a white Protestant to a pluralist America. Fulfills humanities and diversity in the U.S. requirements (1998). Arts/ humanities and sociocultural engagement requirements (2019).

### REL 108. Spread of Buddhism Across Asia. 4.

The course begins with a study of the life of the Buddha, the early formation of Buddhism and the Mahayana reformation, then shifts to its major focus: study of the diffusion of Mahayana Buddhism across Central Asia and China, and into Japan and Korea. Fulfills intercultural requirement (1998). Sociocultural engagement requirement (2019).

### REL 109. QLSP Freshman Seminar. 1.

CR/NC

### REL 110. Quakerism. 4.

Origins and development of the theology, social testimonies and institutional structure of the Quaker movement from the mid-17th century to the present, and their relevance to non-Quaker thought and life. Fulfills humanities requirement (1998). Arts/humanities requirement (2019).

**REL 114. Reading Sacred Texts. 4.**

This course introduces students to religious traditions from around the world through the lens of sacred texts. Students encounter a range of holy writings while learning about interpretation, the creation of religious communities, and different comparative and thematic approaches. Any number of traditions could be explored, including Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, Christianity, Islam, and many others.

**REL 120. American Nature Writing (ENGL 228). 4.**

Examines literary nature writing in America from the 19th century to the present, with a primary focus on the different ways writers have presented the natural world as sacred. Writings consider both our current estrangement from the natural world and possibilities for developing intimacy with the earth through a deep sense of "place." Fulfills humanities and social justice/environmental responsibility requirements (1998). Arts/humanities and evaluating systems and environments requirements (2019).

**REL 122. Men, Masculinities and Religions. 4.**

An introductory course on gender and religion that examines men's ways of being and behaving and its collective influence on Western religious thought and practice. Particular attention will be given to analyzing hegemonic forms of masculinity that support patriarchal gender ideologies and invest religions with androcentric biases. Course readings will touch on major theological conversations (god, human, etc.) and religious concerns (faith, ethics, etc.). Fulfills humanities requirement (1998). Arts/humanities requirement (2019).

**REL 150. Special Topics. 1-8.**

May also be offered at 250, 350 and 450 levels. Possible offerings include Sufism; Gendered Spiritualities; Music in the Muslim World; Exodus from Moses to Bob Marley; Feminine Images in Biblical and Christian Literature; Social Reform and Personal Therapy; 19th- and 20th-century American Religion and Mysticism.

**REL 161. Religion in the New Media. 4.**

Religion is in the news. It informs our perspectives and feeds our search for answers to many ethical questions about how individuals construct meaning and relevance in daily life. The quick answers to burning questions are often sought by the click of a button. New and emerging media renditions inform religion as much as religions permeate life. Fulfills the humanities requirement (1998). Arts/humanities requirement (2019).

**REL 171. Rumi and Revolution. 4.**

This course will seek to study Rumi in primarily aesthetic terms by an examination of his own works and that of his companion, Shams Tabriz. The Rumi that has been recovered through the lens of western poets is also reclaimed by his compatriots in Afghanistan, Iran and Turkey. This study will also examine how current works by Turkish writers like Orhan Pamuk and Elif Shafaq stake their claim in their modern fictional renditions of the life and times of Rumi. Fulfills humanities and intercultural requirements (1998). Arts/humanities and sociocultural engagement requirements (2019).

**REL 200. Native American Religions. 4.**

An advanced introduction to the religion of several Native American tribes, such as the Cherokee, Sioux, Crow and Navaho. Explores the world-views/myths, rituals (including art, dance and music) and the life-ways of these different cultures. Also focuses on the long interaction between American white cultural imperialism and the religions of these indigenous people. Fulfills the humanities and diversity in the U.S. requirements (1998). Arts/humanities and sociocultural engagement requirements (2019).

**REL 201. Women and Gender in Islam. 4.**

This course explores a variety of religious texts, interpretations, traditions, and practices central to understanding women Islam. We examine the diversity in the notion of "Muslim women," in history and around the world. We read the Qur'an in search of messages about marriage, sex, polygyny, adultery, and veiling. We also examine Islamic feminism as a force in contemporary Islam.

**REL 204. Islam. 4.**

Introduces the Islamic religion in its various aspects, including its origins, cultures, rituals, beliefs and practices. The course aims to provide a holistic analysis of Muslim civilizations by exploring some aspects of their rich and diverse contributions through historical and current expressions. Fulfills humanities and intercultural requirements (1998). Art/ humanities and sociocultural engagement requirements (2019).

**REL 208. Hinduism. 4.**

Addresses the religions of India, primarily Hinduism, which is a way of life emphasizing practice more than doctrine; therefore, we look at the lives of people through narratives. We also address the thought and concomitant social systems forming the framework for its acceptance of diverse and often contradictory beliefs and practices. Fulfills intercultural requirement (1998). Art/humanities requirement (2019).

**REL 209. QLSP Sophomore Seminar. 1.**

CR/NC.

**REL 210. Quaker Spirituality. 4.**

This course situates Quaker spirituality within a range of contexts (historical, political, economic, and social) and examines the interplay of spirituality with peace and justice concerns. The course includes an experiential element and considers how Quaker spirituality impacts personal and corporate worship, decision-making, discernment, and physical and emotional well-being.

**REL 215. Hebrew Bible/Old Testament. 4.**

The Hebrew Bible occupies a unique position in relation to the conventional dichotomies between modernity and tradition, East and West. This course will explore the "book" and the contradictions that envelop it, examining the Bible as a multifaceted compilation of ancient Hebrew (and Aramaic and Greek) literature and considering its various roles in contemporary life. Fulfills intercultural requirement (1998). Art/ humanities requirement (2019).

**REL 216. New Testament. 4.**

Explores the literature of the New Testament, emphasizing the manner in which each writer tries to express an understanding of the person and work of Jesus in relation to the early Christian community. Fulfills intercultural requirement (1998). Art/humanities requirement (2019).

**REL 217. The Qur'an and its Interpreter. 4.**

This course introduces students to the Qur'anic scripture, its history, themes, characteristic, and the way in which it has functioned as an authority for Muslims throughout Islamic history. We will examine competing modes of interpretation and the most significant exegetes in the pre-modern and modern periods, paying specific attention to the role of modernity in creating new approaches to Qur'anic interpretation. This course surveys a wide range of exegetical interpretations on 1) women and sexuality, 2) violence and jihād, and 3) religious pluralism. Fulfills intercultural requirement (1998). Art/humanities requirement (2019).

**REL 222. Feminist Theologies. 4.**

An exploration of 19th- and 20th-century feminist religious and theological writers. Considers such issues as the role of religious systems both in establishing and sustaining sexism and in being agents of transformation and justice; sexism and God-language; patriarchal and egalitarian views of human nature; women and ritual; and feminist views of society. Fulfills humanities and social justice/environmental responsibility requirements (1998). Arts/humanities and evaluating systems and environments requirements (2019).

**REL 225. Religion, Bodies, and Sexualities. 4.**

This class ventures into the contentious yet creative possibilities surrounding the intersections of religion, bodies, and sexualities. Our approaches are ontological, methodological, theoretical, and theological, and we tackle a variety of possible topics, including birth, death, healing, and food; celibacy, virginity, college “hook up” culture; and various sexual and gender identities. The course will align primarily with the instructor’s expertise but will include comparative religious elements. Fulfills intercultural requirement (1998). Art/humanities requirement (2019).

**REL 230. Comparative Religious Ethics. 4.**

This course explores the varieties of ethical concepts in different religions, while teaching how to think critically about the applicability of “ethics” as a category and showing how many ethical concepts including notions of “truth” often reflect multiple “truths” in the narratives of the religions, cultures and societies. Fulfills humanities and social justice/environmental responsibility requirements (1998). Arts/humanities and evaluating systems and environments requirements (2019).

**REL 234. African American Religion and Theology. 4.**

This introductory course examines African American Christianity both chronologically and thematically from slave religion to the present and various expressions of Islam in U.S. black communities during in the same period of time. It also pays attention to West African influences and to other religious expressions among African Americans, e.g. Judaism, Buddhism and Humanism. Fulfills humanities and diversity in the U.S. requirements (1998). Arts/humanities and sociocultural engagement requirements (2019).

**REL 236. Reformation: Luther to Fox (HIST 236). 4.**

The course is designed to introduce students to a basic understanding of events and ideas of the Reformation era in Europe, ca. 1517 to 1660. A focal point of our readings will be the reformers’ view of the relation between political and ecclesiastical authority. Fulfills intercultural requirement (1998). Art/humanities requirement (2019).

**REL 237. Jesus in Film and Pop Culture. 4.**

Jesus of Nazareth has captured the world’s imagination for two millennia, and this course focuses on humanity’s multi-faceted engagement with Jesus. Examining Jesus from a multitude of sources’ scriptures, films, literature and art, this class looks at the many ways Christians and non-Christians have created Jesus Christ, and what significance those diverse creations hold. Fulfills intercultural requirement (1998). Art/humanities requirement (2019).

**REL 240. History of Christianity. 4.**

A one-semester survey of the history of the world Christian movement focusing on four centuries (fourth, 12th, 16th, 19th). The course combines three approaches – history of institutions, history of spirituality and history of ideas – and pays close attention to the relationship between religion and culture and the social context of Christian churches. Fulfills intercultural requirement (1998). Art/humanities requirement (2019).

**REL 250. Special Topics. 1-8.****REL 260. Independent Study. 1-8.**

May also be offered at 360 and 460 levels. The individual formulation and completion of the study of a significant problem in the field of religion, such as Play, Celebration and Worship; Existential Psychology; Alchemy; Contemporary Social Change in the Church; Creativity and Imagination; or Women in Modern Japanese Religion

**REL 283. HP:Religions of the Minorities of Southwest China. 4.**

The course explores the religious traditions of the Naxi, Tibetans, Yi, Lisu, Moso, and Bai peoples of Yunnan Province in Southwest China. The Chinese “Cultural Revolution” (1966- 1976), which systematically devastated the religious lives of these peoples, serves as the course’s central historical focus.

Prerequisite: ENGL 102. Fulfills historical perspectives and intercultural requirements (1998). Arts/humanities and sociocultural engagement requirements (2019).

**REL 285. Daoism. 4.**

Explores Daoism, one of the most deeply pervasive and enduring religious/philosophical traditions in Chinese and East Asian culture. The course will focus the early development of Daoist ideas and practices from their inception and eventual institutionalization in China up to the present day. Fulfills intercultural requirement (1998). Art/humanities requirement (2019).

**REL 286. Buddhist Pilgrimage in East Asia. 4.**

The course investigates the role of sacred geography in the religious traditions of East Asia. Taking pilgrimage as the central topic of study, we will read in-depth accounts of religious travel and experience in several regions of East Asia. Fulfills historical perspectives and intercultural requirements (1998). Arts/humanities and sociocultural engagement requirements (2019).

**REL 288. Witches, Ghosts and Demons. 4.**

This course examines the religious roles of witches, ghosts and demons. It is also, fundamentally, a course about death, dying, the fear and anxiety surrounding the dark, the night, death, and the problem of evil. Fulfills intercultural requirement (1998). Art/humanities requirement (2019).

**REL 290. Internship. 1-8.**

May also be offered at the 390 level.

**REL 295. Religious Studies Methods & Theories. 4.**

In this course we examine the range and depth of the theoretical aspects of the field of Religious Studies, and study and practice the various methods employed in our field. This course is required of all majors in Religious Studies and, ideally, should be taken sophomore year.

**REL 309. QLSP Junior Seminar. 1.**

CR/NC.

**REL 310. Islam and Modernization. 4.**

This course examines current discussions on Islam in the contemporary world, privileging politics and war and moving further to explore diverse populations, their religious and cultural practices, their struggles with economic and humanitarian issues as well as contributions made through new social movements, environmental challenges, and attempts to forge civil societies through innovative practices. Fulfills intercultural requirement (1998). Art/humanities requirement (2019).

**REL 312. Muslims, Slavery & Civil Right. 4.**

A three-week course, "Muslims, Slavery, and Civil Rights in the U.S." focuses on the largely neglected history of Islam in America. It explores the critical intersections between Islam, slavery and civil rights in the United States. Venturing into a rich, yet underexplored record of historical material, students in this course will study the biographical accounts of enslaved Muslim Africans, whose personal narratives reshape the story of religious freedom in U.S.

**REL 317. Women in Tibetan Buddhism. 4.**

This course focuses on the religious roles and lives of women of Tibet and the Himalaya from the seventh through the 21st centuries. Also examined are some contemporary "Western" feminist political-philosophical theory and its problematic applicability to the traditional situation of Tibetan women throughout the last 1,300 years. Prerequisite: Historical Perspectives. Fulfills humanities and intercultural requirements (1998). Arts/humanities and sociocultural engagement requirements (2019).

**REL 318. Tibetan & Himalayan Religions. 4.**

Studies the religious traditions of the Himalayas and the Tibetan Plateau as well as the effects of the Chinese occupation of Tibet, the effects of modernization and tourism on local religion and the recent internationalization of Tibetan Buddhism. One prior course in religious studies, history or philosophy is highly recommended. Fulfills intercultural requirement (1998). Art/humanities requirement (2019).

**REL 319. Buddhist Emptiness. 4.**

Explores Indian, Tibetan, Chinese and Japanese Buddhist masters' commentaries on the doctrine that all phenomena including the "self" are "empty of inherent existence," and investigates issues such as religious truth and the ethics of ego-less-ness. Counts toward a major/minor in International Studies – East Asia. Prerequisite: Historical Perspectives, and either one course in PHIL or REL 284, REL 286, or REL 318, or instructor permission. Fulfills intercultural requirement (1998). Arts/humanities requirement (2019).

**REL 322. Mec. of Medicine & Magic. 4.**

This experiential team-taught, intensive, three-week, interdisciplinary study abroad course will take place in and on the grounds of Alnwick Castle in Northumberland, in the far northeastern reaches of England. The course explores the intersections and distinctions between the causal systems, modalities, and mechanisms of magic and medicine. With site visits to the island castle and priory of Lindisfarne, the Scottish city of Edinburgh, the Magic & Medicine Garden of Dilston, Alnwick town, and the castle's bucolic gardens and park grounds, the course will begin with a rigorous investigation into the history of the importance of the concept of causality in both scientific and non-empirical thought, and with student projects about medicinal herbs. The centerpiece of the course will utilize the Reacting to the Past pedagogical engaged-learning collaborative theatrical scenario about Charles Darwin. The final week will involve classes on the castle grounds about postmodern intercultural understandings of magic and the mysteries of the mechanisms of medicine and health. Students will spend the full three-week course living in Alnwick Castle, famously the cinematographic setting of Harry Potter's Hogwarts. There are no prerequisites for this course. Instructor permission required prior to registration.

**REL 340. Contextual Theologies of Europe and North America. 4.**

A reading-intensive, seminar-format examination of 20th- and 21st-century Christian theologians from the North Atlantic region (mostly Germany and the United States) who have written with a deep awareness of their historical, cultural, economic, political and ecological contexts.

**REL 341. Liberation Theologies of Latin America, Africa, and Asia. 4.**

Seminar on Catholic and Protestant Christian theologies from the perspective of poor and disenfranchised women and men. Works from Latin America (Peru, Brazil, El Salvador), Africa (Ghana, South Africa and their regions), and Asia (Philippines, India, Hong Kong). Includes ecofeminist and postcolonial perspectives. Fulfills intercultural requirement (1998). Arts/humanities requirement (2019).

**REL 343. Mormonism. 4.**

This course places the Latter-day Saint faith into American history and explores topics like religious innovation, church-state relations and missionary work. In looking at the Mormon Church, we look at the lives, beliefs, embodied practices and global outreach of this quintessential American religion.

**REL 350. Special Topics. 1-10.****REL 360. Independent Study. 1-8.****REL 390. Internship. 1-8.****REL 395. Religious Studies Colloquium. 1.**

1. Students reflect collectively on the study of religion and its relationship to the liberal arts, to their own college career and to life outside of college. Students complete an intellectual autobiography to further their self-understanding as students of religion. For majors in their junior year. CR/NC.

**REL 409. QLSP Senior Seminar. 1.**

CR/NC.

**REL 415. Contemporary Theology: Holocaust. 4.**

The contemporary Christian theological analysis of and struggle with the nature of self and God is examined in relation to forms of social domination (sexism, racism, classism, militarism, anti-Judaism and Islamophobia) through consideration of religious thinkers.

**REL 422. Contemporary Religious Problems. 4.**

An exploration of one major contemporary thinker or problem, such as religion, language and the body; God and language; or religion and symbol. With changes in content, this course may be repeated more than once.

Prerequisite: instructor permission.

**REL 445. Shamanism. 4.**

In this discussion-style seminar, students read the entirety of Eliade's seminal and controversial work, *Shamanism: Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy*, and problematize the applicability of the term Shamanism to specific religious traditions. Course issues include: initiation, trance, the role of animal messengers and helpers, altered states of consciousness, healing in Shamanism, and others. Prerequisite: Historical Perspectives.

**REL 450. Special Topics. 1-8.****REL 460. Independent Study. 1-8.****REL 465. Theories/Methodology Quaker St. 4.**

This is the culminating class of the Quaker Studies Minor and prepares the student for further work in the field of Quaker Studies, while also building skills for research, writing, and developing arguments as they pertain to the study of religious beliefs, attitudes, and practices. In this course, students will become familiar with the general theories and methodologies surrounding Quaker studies.

**REL 470. Senior Thesis. Credit variable. 1-8.**

Individual study culminating in a thesis, which, in consultation with the advisor, may be submitted for departmental honors. Requires a prior semester's preparation (a two- or four-credit independent study) that can be counted either as a REL 460 or as part of the Senior Thesis.

**REL 490. Departmental Honors. 1-8.**

Requires a 3.5 grade-point average in courses in religious studies and a senior thesis or the equivalent.

**REL 495. Religious Studies Colloquium. 1.**

Students reflect collectively on the study of religion and its relationship to the liberal arts, to their own college career, and to life outside of college. Students complete an intellectual autobiography and a culminating project, to further both their self-understanding and academic journey as students of religion. For majors in their senior year. CR/NC.