# Spring 2011 Religious Studies Course Descriptions

## RELST 2212 Qur'an and Commentary 4 credits
Powers, D.  
MW  2:55PM - 4:10PM  
Crosslisted with NES 2212

*In this seminar, we will read and analyze the Qur'an (in English translation), with attention to the following topics: the collection and redaction of the text; Qur'an recitation; structural, linguistic, and literary features of the text; occasions of revelation and abrogation; major themes; law in the Qur'an; and modes of interpretation. Knowledge of Arabic is not required.*

## RELST 2250 Introduction to Asian Religions 3 credits
Boucher, D.  
MW  2:30PM - 3:20PM  
Crosslisted with ASIAN 2250

*This course will explore a range of religious traditions in South Asia (Pakistan, India, and Sri Lanka) and East Asia (China and Japan) including Hinduism, Buddhism (South and East Asian), Confucianism, Daoism, and Shinto. We will concentrate on these religions in traditional times in order to understand better the historical foundations that have influenced much of what these cultures are today.*

### Discussions:

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## RELST 2630 Religion and Reason 4 credits
MacDonald, S.  
TR  1:25PM - 2:40PM  
Crosslisted with PHIL 2530

*An introduction to some of the main issues in philosophy of religion. Topics may include the existence and nature of God, the problem of evil, the nature of faith, and the epistemology of religious belief. Readings are drawn from the history of philosophy and contemporary philosophical debates.*

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## RELST 2644 Introduction to Judaism 3 credits
Monroe, L.  
TR  1:25PM - 2:40PM  
Crosslisted with NES 2644, JWST 2644

*This course is designed to acquaint students with the varieties of Judaism from ancient times to the early modern period. A strong emphasis will be placed on ancient Jewish civilization, and*
how ancient structures shaped later religious, social, and political trends. Particular attention will be devoted to moments of continuity and change in ideas and practices in each major phase of their historical development. Students will learn to analyze material evidence and primary texts in translation, to engage with the questions brought to bear on this material by contemporary scholars, and to generate their own critical questions. This course will also explore the ways Judaism and the Jewish people have been understood through various interpretive lenses, including sociology, religious studies, anthropology, musicology, women’s studies, and film studies. Students will be encouraged to think creatively and to engage in experiential and hands-on investigation of particular issues.

RELST 3260  Christianity and Judaism  4 credits
Carmichael, C. TR 8:40AM - 9:55AM
Crosslisted with COML 3260


RELST 3309  Temple in World: Buddhism in Contemporary S & SE Asia  3 credits
Blackburn, A. TR 10:10AM - 11:25AM
Crosslisted with ASIAN 3309

Buddhism is often thought of as a meditative and philosophical tradition, remote from the concerns and pleasures of everyday life, practical ethics, and politics. This course explores the unfolding of Buddhist life in contemporary South and Southeast Asia, in locations such as Burma, Thailand, India, Sri Lanka, Malaysia, and Cambodia. We will see how the practices of meditation and philosophical reflection enter the lives of Buddhists, along with other expressions of devotion, aesthetic fascination, political action, and sociability. Our goal will be to recognize the sensual, emotional, and social qualities of Buddhist practice, and the ways in which life unfolds in a Buddhist idiom.

RELST 3420  Myth, Ritual, and Symbol  4 credits
Holmberg, D. TR 11:40AM - 12:55PM
Crosslisted with ANTHR 3420

Examines how systems of thought, symbolic forms, and ritual practice are formulated and expressed in primarily non-Western societies. Focuses on anthropological interpretations of space, time, cosmology, myth, classificatory systems (e.g., color, totems, food, dress, kinship), taboos, sacrifice, witchcraft, sorcery, and rites of passage (birth, initiation, marriage, death). Examines both the roles of specialists (e.g., spirit mediums, curers, priests, ascetics) and nonspecialists in producing these cultural forms.

Discussions:

- 201 F 10:10AM - 11:00AM
- 202 F 11:15AM - 12:05PM
- 203 F 12:20PM - 1:10PM
- 204 F 1:25PM - 2:15PM

RELST 3505  By the Rivers of Babylon  4 credits
Herman, M. MW 2:55PM - 4:10PM
Crosslisted with NES 3505, JWST 3505, ARKEO 3505, CLASS 3630
This course will introduce and explore the history and culture of Babylonian “talmudic” Jewry from the formative Parthian era until the Muslim conquest. Among the sources to be studied: Josephus, the Palestinian and Babylonian Talmuds, Aramaic incantation bowls, Zoroastrian and eastern Christian sources, as well as archaeological evidence and Sasanian epigraphic sources and images. Topics to be addressed will include communal organization, acculturation and Persian culture among the Jews, religious tolerance and intolerance, Jewish leadership, relations with Palestine. Methodological issues taught will include the use of rabbinic sources for historical analysis, earlier and current approaches to the use of rabbinic material.

RELST 3588 Biblical Archaeology 4 credits
Monroe, L. TR 10:10AM - 11:25AM
Crosslisted with NES 3588, JWST 3588, ARKEO 3588

The purpose of the course is to place the Bible within the context of a larger ancient world that can be explored by systematic excavation of physical remains. Students will become familiar with archaeological excavations and finds from ancient Syria-Palestine from 10,000 BCE to 586 BCE. We will explore this archaeological evidence on its own terms, taking into consideration factors such as archaeological method and the interpretive frameworks in which the excavators themselves work, as well as the implications of this body of evidence for understanding the complexity and diversity of biblical Israel.

RELST 3724 Death in the Roman Empire 4 credits
Alexandridis, A. & Platt, V. TR 2:55PM - 4:10PM
Crosslisted with CLASS 3724, ARTH 3724

This co-taught class will explore Roman culture from the late Republic to Late Antiquity through the lens of death and remembrance. We will focus on visual, epigraphic and literary evidence for the ways in which different social groups dealt with loss and mortality and used the context of the tomb to express their social, ethnic, religious and familial identities, both for themselves and to society at large. As well as focusing on Roman Italy, we will explore the blending of Roman and local funerary traditions in diverse contexts within the empire, from the province of Britannia to the Egyptian Fayum and Syrian Palmyra. In addition to the themes of burial ritual, funerary portraiture, the use of mythological and religious iconography, and the influence of Roman traditions upon early Christian burial practices, we will explore the wider significance of death in Roman culture, including the display of death as spectacle in the arena, the impact of imperial funerary monuments upon the urban landscape, and the notion of the “good death” in the Roman moral tradition. The class will be a mixture of lecture and seminar, i.e. students are required to present short papers.

RELST 4260 Biblical Seminar II: The Book of Genesis 4 credits
Carmichal, C. W 2:30PM - 4:25PM
Crosslisted with COML 4260

Discussing attitudes to sexuality in the Bible, we will examine in Old and New Testament texts the clash between ancestral behavior and subsequent laws, as well as the contrast between legal and religious ideas. Topics will include: marriage and divorce, incest, intermarriage, gender discrimination, guilt and shame, homosexuality, women and purity, sexual language and symbols. It should be possible to say something new about the topics and also, because of the perennial nature of the issues, to say something that is relevant to contemporary life.
Prerequisite: 2 RELST courses or permission of instructor. Provides advanced students in religious studies or the humanities familiarity with important methodological issues in the academic study of religion. Following a brief historical outline, major approaches to the academic study of religion currently used and discussed in religious studies are examined. Students read works from the following approaches to the study of religion: anthropology, philosophical hermeneutics, phenomenology, history of religions, the sociology of religion and critical ideological studies. In the final segment, the course focuses on recent developments in the field of religious studies.

How is it that religion can be both a cause of and cure for suffering? In what ways might different religious ideologies be understood as responses to suffering? Such questions are the big issues at stake in this course, which focuses very specifically on three ideologies that emerged in early Christianity: apocalypticism, “gnosticism,” and asceticism. Although we might normally think of persecution and martyrdom as fundamental to early Christianity, ideologies that emphasized the coming end of the world, those that emphasized the divine element within humans, and those that disciplined the body through celibacy, fasting, and other practices came to shape diverse responses to pain, alienation, and suffering in early Christianity. Our readings will focus on some of the writings in the New Testament, the “gnostic” literatures, and monastic texts as well as theoretical writings on the problem of suffering and religion.

This course will explore archaeological and literary evidence for the production, display, ritual treatment and cultural reception of sacred images in ancient Greece. We will focus on some of the most exciting and problematic themes relating to the representation of divine beings in material form, such as the potential and limitations of anthropomorphism; the use of alternative modes of material manifestation such as aniconism, semi-iconic forms (such as herms) and theriomorphism (the representation of gods as animals); the relationship between “cult” and “votive” images; the replication and adaptation of cult statues to new contexts of display; and shifting attitudes to image-worship within polytheistic and monotheistic traditions. Students in Classics, Art History, Religious Studies and Anthropology should find this course of particular interest.

As the first project of the new Cornell-Yale Consortium for the Study of Ancient Art, this course will be taught in parallel with a similar course at Yale University led by Professor Milette Gaifman. At the end of the semester, Cornell students will travel to Yale for a joint graduate mini-conference, where they will present their papers to their peers.
RELST 4931  Vitality and Power in China  4 credits
Hinrichs, T.  T  2:30PM - 4:25PM
Crosslisted with ASIAN 4429, STS 4911, BSOC 4911, HIST 4931, CAPS 4931
Co-meeting with: HIST 6931

Chinese discourses have long linked the circulation of cosmic energies, political power, and bodily vitalities. In these models political order, spiritual cultivation, and health are achieved and enhanced through harmonizing these flows across the levels of Heaven-and-Earth, state, and humankind. It is when these movements are blocked or out of synchrony that we find disordered climates, societies, and illness. In this course, we will examine the historical emergence and development of these models of politically resonant persons and bodily centered polities, reading across primary texts in translation from these otherwise often separated fields. For alternate frameworks of analysis as well as for comparative perspectives, we will also examine theories of power and embodiment from other cultures, including recent scholarship in anthropology and critical theory.

RELST 4991  Directed Study  2-4 credits
Staff  TBA
For majors in Religious Studies; permission of director required.

RELST 4996  Senior Honors Essay II  1-4 credits
Staff  TBA
Required for Honors in Religious Studies. Permission of instructor required.

RELST 7739  The Aesthetics of the Sacred in Ancient Greece  4 credits
Platt, V.  M  1:25PM - 4:25PM
Crosslisted with CLASS 4736, ARTH 4736, RELST 4736, CLASS 7736, ARTH 6736

Please see description for 4736. Graduate-level work will be assigned.