

Religion

The major and minor in religion are administered by the Department of Religion: Professors Crosthwaite (*chair*), Fine (on leave spring 2009), Grayson, Peterson; Associate Professors Penn (on leave 2008–2009), Mrozik, Assistant Professor Steinfelds (on leave 2008–2009); Visiting Assistant Professors Brown, Lyke; Visiting Instructor Heim.

Contact Persons

Anna May Dion, *senior administrative assistant*

Jane Crosthwaite, *chair*

To major in religion is to ask questions about the many ways women and men have sought to make sense of their lives. Examining religious traditions—their notable leaders, their valued texts, and the social behaviors designed to embody their visions—is a central way to study the profound questions that direct so many areas of human endeavor. The study of religion is an excellent way of organizing a liberal arts education so that diverse cultures, artistic expressions, political forces, and gender assignments can be questioned and set in historical and changing contexts.

Requirements for the Major

Credits

- A minimum of 32 credits
- 12 credits at the 300 level
- Only one 395 course will count toward the 300-level requirement.

Courses

At least one course from each of the following three groups:

- Sacred texts and interpretive traditions. For example, Religion 201, Introduction to the Qur'an
- Religious thought (ethics/religious law, philosophy, theology). For example, Religion 226, Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion

- History and society. For example, Religion 218, Women in American Religious History

Other

- Majors must take courses in at least three different major traditions—for example, Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, or Judaism.
- Additional courses are selected in consultation with the advisor.
- Independent work is encouraged and, if approved by the advisor, such work may constitute partial fulfillment of the above requirements.

Requirements for the Minor

Credits

- A minimum of 20 credits (five courses)
- At least one of the five must be at the 300 level.
- At least three of the courses should be taken in the Mount Holyoke Department of Religion.

Recommended Courses for First-Year Students

The following courses are recommended for first-year students: 100, 201, 202, 203, 204, 206, 212, 226, 261, and 263.

Course Offerings

100fs Introduction to Religion

This course is an introduction to the study of religion, assessing the nature of religion and methodological approaches through an examination of subject matter drawn from numerous traditions.

Meets Humanities I-B requirement

J. Grayson, S. Heim

4 credits

***104s Introduction to Judaism**

(Same as Jewish Studies 104fs) Judaism is a 3,500-year-old tradition that has developed over time as Jewish communities all over the world creatively interacted with the different cultural and historical milieus in which they lived. This course explores the ways in which Judaism has sought to transform ordinary life into sacred life. What are the ways in which Judaism conceives of God, and what is the meaning of life? What roles do study, prayer, ethics, sex, marriage, family, rituals of the life cycle, and community play in Judaism? These and other questions will be taken up through study of diverse types of religious literature and historical evidence.

Meets Humanities I-B requirement

L. Fine

4 credits

109f First-Year Seminar: "The Cost of Discipleship": An Assassination Plot, Faith, Love, and Piano Wire

(First-year seminar) The extraordinary witness demonstrated by Dietrich Bonhoeffer--German pastor and Christian theologian--during the Second World War serves as a sober reminder of the high stakes the world places on religious commitment. Bonhoeffer's complicity in the plot to assassinate Hitler raises the ethical dilemma everyone faces when confronted by the forces of evil. What is the believer's proper response? Is violent resistance ever justified? Does "the end justify the means"?

Meets Humanities I-B requirement

J. Grayson

Prereq. fy only; 4 credits

201s Introduction to the Qur'an

This course examines the history, structure, and themes of the Qur'an and analyzes the place of the Qur'an in Islamic religious thought. It emphasizes the contribution of the Qur'an to questions of universal import. Topics include Qur'anic doctrines of God, humanity, freedom and determinism, and the problem of evil.

Meets multicultural requirement; meets Humanities I-B requirement

D. Brown

4 credits

202f Introduction to Islam

(Same as Asian Studies 202f) This course is intended to introduce students with little or no prior knowledge of Islam to basic Islamic texts, concepts, and practices. Starting with an introduction to the figure of the Prophet Muhammad and the Qur'an, we will survey some of the most important themes and issues in Islamic experience and belief: conversion/Islamization, law (shari'ah), mysticism, theology, political theory, and the experience of Muslims in non-Muslim countries.

Meets multicultural requirement; meets Humanities I-B requirement

D. Brown

4 credits

203f Introduction to the Hebrew Bible

(Same as Jewish Studies 203) This course provides a critical introduction to the writings contained in the Hebrew Bible (also known as the Old Testament). It investigates the social and historical context of the ancient Israelites, examines a range of ancient Near Eastern literature, and introduces the principal methods of biblical studies. Participants will read much of the Hebrew Bible as well as select non-Israelite sources. Examples of recent biblical scholarship will provide additional information for better understanding these writings and will present different methods for approaching and interpreting ancient texts.

Meets Humanities I-B requirement

L. Lyke

4 credits

204s Introduction to the New Testament

(Same as Jewish Studies 204) This course investigates the social and historical context of first and early second-century Christianity, examines New Testament and select non-canonical documents, and introduces participants to the principal methods of New Testament studies. Students will read the twenty-seven works that make up most modern collections of the New Testament, a number of early Christian documents that did not make the final cut, and several ancient non-Christian sources. Examples of recent New Testament scholarship will provide historical background for better understanding of Christian writings and will present different

methods for approaching and interpreting ancient texts.

Meets Humanities I-B requirement

L. Lyke

4 credits

***205s Issues in Islamic History: Classical Islamic Civilization**

This introductory course provides a broad, chronologically structured overview of Islamic history, focusing on major issues that have been of religious significance to Muslims in various eras. Using case studies, ranging from episodes in the early Islamic conquests to the growth of Islam in urban America, we will examine enduring themes and contextual variations in the history of Islam.

This course examines the development of Islamic civilization from the time of the Prophet Muhammad to the sixteenth century. Particular attention will be paid to the political structures of the caliphates, the process of conquest and conversion, and interaction with non-Muslim cultures. Literature, art, architecture, and philosophical and scientific works of classical Islamic civilization will be used as primary sources for this course.

Meets multicultural requirement; meets Humanities I-B requirement

A. Steinfels

4 credits

***206f Early Christianity in Conflict**

This course examines how conflicts between Christians and non-Christians, conflicts between different groups of Christians, and conflicts within given Christian communities shaped first- through fourth-century Christianity and influenced subsequent Christian history. We will pay particular attention to issues surrounding martyrdom, "heresy," anti-Judaism, the formation of a male-dominated clergy, and competing views regarding sexuality.

Meets Humanities I-B requirement

M. Penn

4 credits

***207f Women and Gender in Islam**

This course will examine a range of ways in which Islam has constructed women--and women have constructed Islam. We will study concepts of gender in Islam as well as

in classical Islamic texts, as well as different aspects of the social, economic, political, and ritual lives of women in various Islamic societies.

Meets multicultural requirement; meets Humanities I-B requirement

A. Steinfels

4 credits

***208f Texts and Readers: Introduction to the Religious Classics of Judaism**

(Same as Jewish Studies 208fs)

Meets Humanities I-B requirement

4 credits

***210s Religious Ethics**

This course explores the ethical implications of religious convictions, particularly implications relevant to personal decisions. It introduces ethical principles through an examination of scriptural sources, a selection of major moral thinkers, and illustrative moral dilemmas. Among the concerns of the course are the components and motives of personal decision, the values and liabilities of fixed norms and principles, and the nature of personal responsibility.

Meets Humanities I-B requirement

J. Crosthwaite

Prereq. soph, jr, sr; 4 credits

212f Introduction to Judaism

(Same as Jewish Studies 212) Judaism is a 3,500-year-old tradition that has developed over time as Jewish communities all over the world creatively interacted with the different cultural and historical milieus in which they lived. This course explores the ways in which Judaism has sought to transform ordinary life into sacred life. What are the ways in which Judaism conceives of God, and what is the meaning of life? What roles do study, prayer, ethics, sex, marriage, family, rituals of the life cycle, and community play in Judaism? These and other questions will be taken up through study of diverse types of religious literature and historical evidence.

Meets Humanities I-B requirement

L. Fine

4 credits

***215f Jewish Spiritual Autobiographies**

(Same as Jewish Studies 215f)

Meets Humanities I-B requirement

L. Fine

4 credits

218f Women in American Religious History

(Same as Gender Studies 210) This course is a critical study of significant women (Anne Hutchinson, Mother Ann Lee, Mary Baker Eddy, Ellen Gould White, Aimee Semple McPherson, Dorothy Day, and others) and their roles in the pluralistic character of American religion. It raises central questions concerning leadership, marginality, deviant behavior, and criticism of women. Students are expected to contribute to the course by their participation and individual research.

Meets Humanities I-B requirement

J. Crosthwaite

Prereq. soph, jr, sr; 4 credits

220s Ethics and Public Policy

This course focuses on ethics in the public sphere, on moral aspects of international, national, and institutional policy. It is concerned with evidence in policies and their formulation, of values with theological or religious roots. Emphasis is on thinkers who embody a double concern: religious/moral values and some area of public policy. Issues considered may include distribution of natural resources, national defense policy, health care distribution, gender, poverty, and the distribution of wealth.

Meets Humanities I-B requirement

J. Crosthwaite

Prereq. soph, jr, sr; 4 credits

***221f Religious Movements in America**

This course is a study of the historical and theological development of the religious traditions in America, an assessment of the influence of these traditions on American civil institutions, and an examination of selected contemporary religious movements.

Meets Humanities I-B requirement

J. Crosthwaite

Prereq. soph, jr, sr; 4 credits

***222s Engendering Judaism: Women and Jewish Tradition**

(Same as Jewish Studies-222-01 and Gender Studies-210-02)

Meets Humanities I-B requirement

L. Fine

4 credits

***226f Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion**

(Same as Philosophy 226fs) This course begins its survey of the discipline of the philosophy of religion with the work of Augustine. We then proceed to an examination of the classical theistic arguments for knowledge of God's existence (those of Anselm, Aquinas, and Maimonides) that dominated Scholastic thought and consider the criticisms of these approaches by Enlightenment philosophers such as Kant. We trace the rise of experience as the central category of pietism and romanticism in the texts of Schleiermacher and Coleridge and in the poetry of Novalis. Finally, we focus on the pragmatic tradition in American philosophy of religion, especially in the work of William James, Josiah Royce, and Cornel West.

Meets Humanities I-B requirement

J. Grayson

4 credits

***228s On Human Freedom: Lordship and Bondage in Religion and Culture**

This course offers a critical investigation of selected materials taken from Eastern, Western, and Third World religious and cultural texts and customs in order to appreciate their respective views on human freedom. Particular attention is given to the varied definitions and meanings of freedom; the master/slave relationship as a universal paradigm for reflecting on freedom; some moral and ethical implications associated with the idea of freedom; and the connections among freedom, will, and human identity.

Meets multicultural requirement; meets Humanities I-B requirement

J. Grayson

Prereq. Religion 100 or 226, or permission of instructor; 4 credits

230s Spirituals and the Blues

This course examines and analyzes African American music as a primary textual source for understanding philosophical and religious language within that community. It addresses various questions: What are the central philosophical and religious themes expressed within the text? How are these themes reflected in the music? What is the intrinsic character of the spirituals and the

blues? Is there such a thing as a “music of oppression”? In what way(s) does the black experience contribute to philosophical and religious understanding, as well as the use of language? What does this material suggest about the connections among art, literature, and experience?

Meets multicultural requirement; meets Humanities I-B requirement

J. Grayson

Prereq. soph, jr, sr; 4 credits

231f The Short Story in the Hebrew Bible: From Hero to Heroine

(Same as Jewish Studies 231) In this course we shall read a number of self-contained stories in the Hebrew Bible with attention to the subtlety and sophistication with which they are crafted. We shall also consider the social nature of the composition of these biblical traditions and the ways that stories once told of the great men of tradition evolve to telling of the great women who save their people. Texts considered include the Joseph novella, the account of David’s demise, Jonah, Ruth, Esther, and Judith.

Meets Humanities I-B requirement

L. Lyke

4 credits

***235f Introduction to Jewish Mysticism**

(Same as Jewish Studies 235f) Mysticism refers to a type of religious life in which individuals seek intimate and personal, direct and intense experience of the Divine. There exists a rich and fascinating Jewish mystical tradition with hundreds of books of diverse kinds. This course examines the Kabbalah of thirteenth-century Spain, focusing upon the seminal work of this period, the *Sohar*; the synthesis of mysticism and messianism that occurred in the city of Safed (in the Land of Israel) in the sixteenth century; and the popular pietistic movement of eastern Europe from the eighteenth century forward, Hasidism; and various expressions of mystical spirituality in our own time.

Meets Humanities I-B requirement

L. Fine

4 credits

241s Women and Buddhism

(Same as Gender Studies 210) The course examines Buddhist representations of women and women’s representations of Buddhism. We will study materials by and about Buddhist women from Thailand, India, China, Tibet, Japan, and the U.S. Some of the questions we will ask are: How are women portrayed in Buddhist literature? How do they portray themselves? How have Buddhist women responded to sexism in their communities? How have Buddhist women contributed to the development of new Buddhist institutions?

Meets multicultural requirement; meets Humanities I-B requirement

S. Mrozik

4 credits

***255s Dimensions of Contemporary Judaism in America**

(Same as Jewish Studies 255) Contemporary Judaism in America is in a state of extraordinary ferment and creative transition. This course will explore significant aspects of this ferment, including ritual innovation and experimentation, theological creativity, Jewish feminism, the growing interest in Jewish spirituality, Jewish environmentalism, Zionism, and the religious repercussions of the Holocaust.

Meets Humanities I-B requirement

L. Fine

4 credits

261f Hinduism

(Same as Asian Studies 261f) A major religious tradition of India, Hinduism is in practice a multiplicity of expressions. This course explores Hinduism’s diverse traditions through its history, unifying themes, texts, and popular observances. We will read from the great texts (*Ramayana*, *Mahabharata*), learn about gods and goddesses (Krishna, the Great Goddess), and discuss art and ritual. Topics include: body techniques and the material universe (yoga, Tantra); philosophical traditions, concepts (karma, dharma); religious figures (Mirabai); movements (Bhakti). Hinduism’s contemporary expressions in India and the West will be considered in social and historical context. Frequent illustration is provided through videos.

Meets multicultural requirement; meets Humanities I-B requirement

I. Peterson
4 credits

263f Buddhism

(Same as Asian Studies 263f) Some scholars have argued that there is no such thing as “Buddhism” in the singular, but only “Buddhisms” in the plural. This course introduces students to the historically and culturally diverse expressions of Buddhism. We will ask ourselves what Buddhism has meant to different people in different times and places, with particular attention to changing conceptions of belief and practice. Among the traditions we will study are Theravada, Zen, Pure Land, and Tantra.

Meets multicultural requirement; meets Humanities I-B requirement

S. Mrozik

4 credits

265f Holy Feast, Holy Fast: Sacred Food and Eating in Judaism

(Same as Jewish Studies 265) This course explores the role of food and eating in Jewish religious culture, but will also include a significant comparative religious dimension. Topics will include the ritual, religious, and social significance of the dietary laws in Judaism, the symbolic foods of Passover and other festivals, fasting and ascetic attitudes toward food, as well as food culture as a marker of Jewish identity.

Meets Humanities I-B requirement

L. Fine

4 credits

267s An Introduction to Buddhist Ethics

This is an introduction to contemporary and classical Buddhist ethical ideals. Working with primary and secondary sources, we will ask the following questions: Is the universe moral? What are Buddhist ethical ideals and who embodies these? How do contemporary Buddhists interpret classical ethical ideals? What moral dilemmas do Buddhists face today? How do Buddhists grapple with moral ambiguity? We will consider the perspectives of Buddhists from different cultures including India, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Vietnam, Japan, and the United States.

Meets multicultural requirement; meets Humanities I-B requirement

S. Mrozik

4 credits

***268s Buddhist Literature from Ginsberg to Gautama**

(Same as Asian Studies) This course is an introduction to Buddhist literature. We will read and discuss works from diverse cultures and historical periods, including contemporary North American Buddhist fiction, ancient Indian biographies of the Buddha, and medieval Japanese Buddhist poetry. We will ask how Buddhists, living in different times and places, have imagined the path to liberation.

Meets multicultural requirement; meets Humanities I-B requirement

S. Mrozik

4 credits

***275s The Ethics of Interpersonal Relations in Judaism**

(See Jewish Studies 275(01)) As in other religious traditions, interpersonal relations are central to Judaism. Drawing upon both classical and modern textual sources, this course explores such themes as responsibility, compassion, humility, and honesty in interpersonal affairs. It also considers notions of love, friendship, and teacher-disciple relations, both between individuals and in the context of religious community.

Meets Humanities I-B requirement

L. Fine

4 credits

295fs Independent Study

Does not meet a distribution requirement

The department

Prereq. soph, permission of department;

1 to 4 credits

***306s Sex and the Early Church**

(Same as Gender Studies 333) This course examines the various ways first-through fifth-century Christians addressed questions regarding human sexuality. We will concentrate on the rise of sexual asceticism and pay particular attention to the relationship between sexuality and issues of gender, culture, power, and resistance. Primary readings will include letters, narrative accounts of female and male ascetics, monastic rules, and “heretical” scriptures. These will be supplemented by modern scholarship in early Christian studies and the history of sexuality.

Meets Humanities I-B requirement

M. Penn

Prereq. Previous course in religion or gender studies; 4 credits

311f Sufism: The Mystic Path in Islam

Exploration of the mystical tradition in Islam known as Sufism, from its origins in medieval Iraq to its role in contemporary Islamic societies. This course focuses on how the Sufi pursuit of unity with, or annihilation in, God relates to the core monotheistic beliefs of Islam. Sufi theories and practices are studied through primary source materials. Special attention will be paid to issues of orthodoxy, heresy, and antisocial behavior in the history of Sufism.

Meets multicultural requirement; meets Humanities I-B requirement

D. Brown

4 credits

***322s Modern Theology**

This course is a study of representative theologians in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries who have made significant contributions to religious thinking in the West. Thinkers include Kierkegaard, Schleiermacher, Bultmann, Barth, Tillich, and others. Emphasis is on the nineteenth century.

Meets Humanities I-B requirement

J. Grayson

Prereq. 8 credits in department, Religion 226 recommended, or permission of instructor; 4 credits

323fs Topics in Contemporary Theology

Fall 2008

**323f(01) Modern Mythmaking and Religion*

The power of sacred myths to shape cultural worldviews is extraordinary. This course examines, compares, and critiques this phenomenon in an attempt to understand how it informs the spiritual journey. From *Siddhartha* to *The DaVinci Code*, chronicles on religious personalities have commanded rapt attention throughout history. Using the structural analysis of Geertz, Tillich, Eliade, and Crites, texts such as *Life of Pi*, *The Alchemist*, *The Matrix*, and other prominent accounts will be placed against the great spiritual stories of major religious traditions

in order to determine their status as contemporary sacred myths.

Meets Humanities I-B requirement

J. Grayson

Prereq. 8 credits in department or permission of instructor; 4 credits

Spring 2009

323s(01) Feminist Theologies

(Same as Gender Studies 333) Mary Daly, Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza, Phyllis Trible, and Judith Plaskow, among others, have argued that traditional Jewish and Christian theological systems have overlooked the needs, concerns, histories, and contributions of women. Their challenges range from the historical modification of a presumably unbiased religious system to the outright rejection of a so-called patriarchal establishment.

Whatever their approach, feminist theologies offer diverse and incisive tools for understanding how a theological system operates, how transitory cultural assumptions become embedded in ongoing doctrines, and how apparently minor adjustments can have significant ripple effects.

Meets Humanities I-B requirement

J. Crosthwaite

Prereq. 8 credits in department or permission of instructor; 4 credits

323s(02) The Women Who Shaped the Mind of Frederick Douglass

Eight women--Harriet Bailey, Betsey Bailey, Sophia Auld, Anna Murray, Julia Crofts-Griffiths, Annie Douglass, Otilia Assing, and Helen Pitts--occupied crucial roles in the formation of Frederick Douglass's mind. In this seminar we will read closely Douglass's three autobiographies and related primary sources in order to discern the theological significance these women had for him. Students also will be introduced to contemporary readings in theological hermeneutics in order to consider its implications for reading and interpreting autobiography.

Meets Humanities I-B requirement

J. Grayson

Prereq. 8 credits in department or permission of instructor; 4 credits

325s Asian Religions: Sacred Narratives in the Hindu Tradition

(Same as Asian Studies 325) Telling, enacting, and listening to stories are essential modes of religious activity in the Hindu tradition. We will study the major types of sacred narrative in Hinduism, including creation myths, epic tales, stories of the gods, women's stories, and the lives of exemplary figures such as the saint-devotees of Shiva and Krishna. The tales will be examined from the perspectives of narrative structure and meaning in relation to forms of expression (e.g., the icon of the dancing Shiva, the *Ramayana* epic theater), and contexts (e.g., women's rites and the festival of the great Goddess).

Meets multicultural requirement; meets Humanities I-B requirement

The department

Prereq. jr, sr; Religion 261 (Hinduism); or permission of instructor; 4 credits

326f Buddhism in the Pioneer Valley

This course is a research seminar on Buddhism in the Pioneer Valley. We will begin by studying the history and development of Buddhism in North America, then turn our attention to local Buddhist communities. Students will design and execute individual research projects on some aspect of Buddhism in the Pioneer Valley.

Meets Humanities I-B requirement

S. Mrozik

Prereq. soph, jr, sr; 4 credits in religion, Asian studies, or anthropology; 4 credits

332f Seminar in American Religious**History: The Shakers**

(Same as American Studies 301-02) This course will examine the historical and cultural creation of the Shaker society. The religious vision of an alternative society whose birth and development paralleled that of the new American nation; by contrast and by imitation, the separate Shaker route thus offers an intriguing critique of American society and its values, and an unusual laboratory for examining a religious community based on a dual godhead.

Meets Humanities I-B requirement

J. Crosthwaite

Prereq. jr, sr, 8 credits in department, Religion 221 or permission of instructor; 4 credits

***345fs Topics in the Study of Islam**

This course offers advanced students an opportunity to investigate with some sophistication a problem that requires careful attention to research methods, to critical literature, and to writing. Seminar topics include people, periods, or problems that have a particular bearing on religion in America.

Fall 2008

***345f(01) Islam in South Asia**

This course will examine the spread and development of Islamic religious traditions in South Asia, i.e., India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh. Particular attention will be paid to different modes of interaction with the indigenous, largely Hindu, traditions, including conversion, accommodation, and conflict. The relationship between political and religious identities, the Partition of South Asia on religious lines, and the recent growth of fundamentalism and religious violence, will also be covered.

Meets multicultural requirement; meets Humanities I-B requirement

A. Steinfels

Prereq. Religion 201, 202, 205, or 207 or permission of instructor; 4 credits

Spring 2009

345s(01) Islam in the Twenty-first*Century: Readings in Islamic Fundamentalism and Liberalism**

This course will explore the history of the most important ideas and trends in contemporary Islamic thought, beginning with their roots in the great classics of the Islamic tradition by Ibn Khaldun, al-Ghazali, and Ibn Taymiyya. Close reading of the most important modern Muslim thinkers, including Muhammad Abduh, Muhamad Iqbal, Sayyid Qutb, Ali Shariati, Fazlur Rahman, and Mohammed Arkoun.

Meets multicultural requirement; meets Humanities I-B requirement

D. Brown

Prereq. Religion 201, 202, 205, or 207 or permission of instructor; 4 credits

**346s The End Is Near: The Rise of
Biblical Apocalyptic**

(Same as Jewish Studies 346) This course investigates the emergence in the Hebrew Bible of apocalyptic thought and texts. We shall begin by considering ancient Near Eastern mythological accounts and trace the ways these myths are employed to articulate Israelite historical traditions. In later texts we will consider the reemergence of mythological imagery in the apocalyptic texts of the late Second Temple period and in the Book of Revelation in the New Testament.

Meets Humanities I-B requirement

L. Lyke

Prereq. 8 credits in department; 4 credits

***352f Written on the Body:
Body Images and Practices in
Religious Traditions**

This course examines body images and practices in diverse religious traditions around the world. Working with different methodological and theoretical perspectives, we will ask the following questions: What are bodies? How do body images perpetuate or challenge religious and social norms? What roles do bodies play in religious experience? We will generate answers to these questions by investigating a wide range of religious phenomena including healing rituals, relics, saints, fasting, asceticism, and modest dress.

Meets Humanities I-B requirement

S. Mrozik

4 credits

395fs Independent Study

Does not meet a distribution requirement

The department

Prereq. jr, sr, permission of department;

1 to 8 credits