

Department of Religion
Fall 2018 Course Offerings
Course Blurbs

Consult the Course Catalog for [specific and detailed course descriptions](#)
(<https://bit.ly/2F1bNXf>).

REL 100 ST: Religion and Hip Hop (Gray; bmgray@syr.edu)
TTh 9:30-10:50

REL 101 Religions of the World (Waghorne; jpwaghor@syr.edu)
MW 10:35-11:40; discussion sections Fridays, 9:30-10:25; 10:35-11:30

Unlike many courses in the religions of the world, this course will not move week-by-week through the so-called "major religions" -Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, Islam, Christianity, etc. Rather, we will guide you in learning how to understand the religious life of others and toward imagining what life would be like within multiple religious worlds. By working through several key moments in the religious history of the modern world, we will consider how differing religious sensibilities intertwined with the personal, political, social, and aesthetic experience in an increasingly interconnected world. The cases will include: Mahatma Gandhi and the movement for the Independence of India from the British Empire; an Islamic family enduring the changes in Egypt as that county moved toward self-rule; and the rise of Japanese art and Zen practices in the United States as the county began to gain world-wide hegemony. "Religion" in this sense does not exist apart from the lives of human beings and remains grounded in history and culture.

REL 108 Religion and its Critics (Robert; wrobert@syr.edu)
MW 5:15-6:35

With religion, modernity reached its breaking point. By the 19th century, religion was under critique. Friedrich Nietzsche announced that God was dead. Karl Marx called religion the opium of the people. Sigmund Freud diagnosed religion as the universal obsessional neurosis of humanity. This course investigates these critics of religion and their lasting legacies in our world. We will pay particular attention to contemporary media as modes of religious critique. *REL 108 is on the list of approved courses used to fulfill the Critical Reflections requirement.*

REL/JSP 114 The Bible in History, Culture, Religion (Watts; jwwatts@syr.edu)
TTh 3:30-4:50

The Bible is among the world's most widely-read literature, and has influenced art, literature, law and politics as well as religious traditions. This survey of Jewish and Christian scriptures pays particular attention to the function of the Torah, the Gospels, and the Bible as ancient and modern scriptures, as well as their literary contents, their composition, and their role in the development of Western religions and cultures.

REL 126 Ecstasy, Transgression, Religion (Robert; wrobert@syr.edu)
MW 3:45-5:05

Edges are where things get really interesting. This course explores edges of human possibility, where humans touch what lies on the other side of its limits. We will explore these edges by examining ecstasy and transgression as risky limit-experiences of, and limit-cases for, religion. We will focus on studying limit-experiences of mysticism, eroticism, the passions they enflame, and the actions they engender.

REL/JSP/LIT 131 Great Jewish Writers (Frieden; kfrieden@syr.edu)

TTh 11:00-12:20

A wide-angle panorama of great stories written by Jewish authors, including Kohelet, S. Y. Abramovitsh, Sholem Aleichem, I. L. Peretz, Franz Kafka, S. Y. Agnon, Elie Wiesel, and Yiddish women writers. Topics include ancient biblical wisdom, shtetl life, superstition, modernization, alienation, rebellion against authority, radical textualism, love, marriage, and the Nazi genocide.

Our literary approach to works in the Jewish literary tradition emphasizes interconnections between theme and rhetoric. Immersion in texts, a particular tendency in traditional Jewish circles, sometimes appears as an escape from Jews' powerlessness in the outside world. The strategy has limitations.

REL/JSP 135 Judaism (Braiterman; zbraiter@syr.edu)

TTh 12:30-1:50

The course provides a broad (but selective) survey of Jewish religious thought and practice from the biblical period through the modern. Readings focus on the way diverse Jewish thinkers have reshaped Jewish identity by reconfiguring the way in which they understand ritual life. We pay particular attention to how Jewish interpreters have constructed a changing textual tradition as an integral part of that process. This class introduces students to the Hebrew Bible, Talmud and Midrash, medieval philosophy and mysticism, and to German Jewish existentialism and American Jewish feminism in the 20th century. Special note is paid to the modern period and the role of women.

REL 156 Christianity (Robinson; mrobin03@syr.edu)

TTh 11:00-12:20

This course covers Christianity's institutional forms, sacred writings, ideas and beliefs, worship practices, cultural and creative expressions, and ethical and political roles in society, from antiquity to the present. In covering these things, this course basically asks what Christianity has to do with being human. That is, how does Christianity address human needs, concerns, and desires? What are some of the problems that Christianity has caused believers and non-believers? And, why, in spite of its problems, does it remain appealing and viable to a broad array of people over centuries and across cultures?

REL/MES 165 Discovering Islam

Sec M001 MW 12:45-2:05 (Abdel-Meguid; aelsaved@syr.edu)

This course is an introduction to Islam as a religion and a civilization. The course will be divided in three parts. The first part will examine the formation of Islamic civilization in the pre-modern era. We will start with the key stages of the life of Prophet Muhammad, the articulation of the fundamentals of Islam as a way of life and a worldview and a brief survey of Islamic history. The course subsequently turns to a brief investigation of the two sources of Islam (Qur'an and Sunna—the tradition of the prophet) and how the main

Muslim intellectual traditions and religious factions approached and interpreted them. In this vein we will explore the main themes and development of Islamic law (*fiqh*), Philosophy, Theology (*kalām*) and Mysticism (*Sufism*) and the key differences between Sunni and Shiite Islam.

The second part of the course gives a glimpse of classical Islamic thought and the conception of the relation among Islamic sciences at the height of Islamic civilization. In this respect we will examine the relation between faith and reason and how the Islamic sciences dealt with it in one of the key works of one of the towering figures of classical Islamic philosophy, al-Walīd ibn Rushd—Latin Averroes—(d. 1198 C.E.). The third and last part of the course will examine the Islamic conception of ethics and politics. In this vein, it will compare and contrast classical and contemporary perspectives on these central problems.

REL/MES/SAS 165 Sec U800 (Kassam; tkassam@syra.edu) online

Islam is the world's fastest growing religion. Like Judaism and Christianity, it is an Abrahamic faith yet it remains unknown and misunderstood in the West. Take this course to understand the Muslim world and discover its historical roots, core teachings and cultural diversity.

REL/SAS 185 Hinduism (Gold; aggold@syra.edu)

TTh 11:00-12:20

This course introduces Hindu traditions and practices. Our strategy is to move between cosmological, theological and philosophical understandings, and the ways these motivate ordinary and extraordinary human lives. We see these understandings expressed through myth and moral teachings, storytelling and poetry, ritual and devotion. Thus our syllabus materials include some classic texts and teachings of ancient Indian civilization and more recent poetry, tales and ethnographic descriptions. Throughout the course we remain interested in contemporary Indian society where Hinduism's many streams of thought have ongoing significance.

REL 191 Religion, Meaning and Knowledge (Robinson; mrobin03@syra.edu)

TTh 5:00-6:20

This course explores the age-old quest for meaning, knowledge and faith in the face of suffering and loss through art, philosophy, music and literature.

REL 200 ST: Is God Black? An Introduction to Black Theology (Gray; bmgray@syra.edu)

TTh 2:00-3:20

REL/ANT 221 Morality and Community (Fisher; gfisher@syra.edu)

TTh 9:30-10:50

In an ever-shrinking world, we increasingly encounter others with different moral systems from our own, that is, different ways of thinking about who we are, what we believe, and how we should behave within a larger social order. Often these "moralities" define not only how we think about ourselves but also how we shape our place as part of a community. Through discussion, analytical papers, and problem-solving workshops, this

course will interrogate the relationship between morality and community: do different societies draw on diverse cultural frameworks to create a range of different moralities or do people manufacture diverse moralities in order to create distinct “communities”? Is religious conflict created by colliding moral visions or are differences in morality constructed to create purpose and identity among communities already in dispute?

Far from merely considering these questions in the abstract, this course will examine people in the contemporary world who are wrestling with these questions in their everyday lives. These groups include residents of China living under rapid urban change; churches in Botswana losing members of their congregations to AIDS; Muslim schoolgirls in France who defy the government by veiling themselves in school; adolescent girls in Crown Heights, New York who struggle with their identities as Hasidic Jews; Evangelicals in the United States who aim to create a “Christian” nation; and urban U.S. communities disrupted by violence and incarceration. No prerequisites other than the ability and willingness to think; open to students at all levels. *REL/ANT 221 is on the list of approved courses used to fulfill the Critical Reflections requirement.*

**HNR 240 How Religion Makes Bodies (Borchert; jwborche@syr.edu) HONORS
MWF 10:35-11:30**

What can a body do? is a central question to religious thinking: What does it mean to be human? To be non-human? What is a human body? Where are its limits? What can a religious body do differently? This question of the body is one way to begin an inquiry into what it means to be human, and religion is one way to think about the limits of embodiment. For example, how is the body of a monk who meditates and eats very little shaped differently than the body of a yogi? How is a female body seen differently than a male body? This course will use fiction, film, and philosophy to look through historical, theological, anthropological, scientific and literary lenses as it raises questions about human embodiment in relation to religious ideas and practices.

**REL 242 Religious Issues in American Life (Niebuhr; rgniebuh@syr.edu)
MW 3:45-5:05**

How contemporary religious ideas, individuals, and organizations intersect with major political and cultural issues in the United States.

**REL/NAT 244/ANT 273 Indigenous Religions (Arnold; pparnold@syr.edu)
TTh 8:00-9:20**

This course explores a long neglected aspect of the world's religions--Indigenous religions--that is religions that are primarily defined as culturally oriented toward particular landscapes. Because the category of "Indigenous" encompasses a tremendous cultural variety, our first task must be to discuss the category itself. What does "Indigenous Religions" mean? On one hand Indigenous religions are in contact with, yet distinct from, the “great,” or global religions such as Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, etc. On the other hand there are indigenous elements in all of religious life. Indeed we will consider how being indigenous is directly connected with religious creativity. Our second task will be to investigate this complicated topic by looking at particular cases and issues confronting indigenous peoples. These will be largely taken in our reading from the Americas. For our third task we look at the religious forces that are contrary to indigenous traditions. For this

we will look at the Doctrine of Discovery and also read what Indigenous Peoples are communicating to the world in their work through the United Nations. At each of these three turns in the course we will self-consciously reflect on the cultural distances between the world views which constitute modernity (and the university) and the world views which constitute Indigenous peoples.

REL 255 Psychology, Spirituality, Love & Ethics (Wallwork; ewallwork@verizon.net)

TTh 2:00-3:20

This course invites you to look at your own dreams, loves, conflicts, moral beliefs, and religious practices, and those of people around you, from the perspective of the unconscious passions at play. Drawing on the clinical findings of Freud, Jung, Fromm, Erikson and contemporary psychoanalysts, the course investigates various aspects of unconsciously-motivated conduct. The main criticisms that depth psychological theorists have directed at conventional religion and morality are considered alongside the guidance these same theorists offer regarding how to live and what to believe. *REL 255 is on the list of approved courses used to fulfill the Critical Reflections requirement.*

REL 294 Mythologies (Waghorne; jpwaghor@syr.edu)

MW 3:45-5:05

Often disguised “mythic” forms influence our popular culture, politics, and advertising. A consideration of myth can help unravel the power of so much of daily life in the digital/Facebook world functioning beyond rationalistic views or even open ideology. Beginning with cosmogonic myths of the creation of the world and classic heroic tales in multiple cultures, the course will trace the long debate on interpreting myth from early psychoanalysis to popular figures like Joseph Campbell to harsh warning of the dangers of myth from Roland Barthes and others especially after the rise of Hitler.

REL 300⁵ ST: Holocaust, Memory & Visual Arts (Gruber)

MW 3:45-5:05 (meets with JSP 300 m016 and HOA 300 M002)

The Holocaust is now a specific historic event – or series of events – from which today’s students are already removed by several generations. “Holocaust” signifies an entire frame of cultural, political and religious reference that begins in the first years of Nazi power and continues today. The representation and presentation of the Holocaust is both historic and contemporary.

This course examines the way in which the history and horrors of the Holocaust (or Shoah) have been presented in the visual arts, including drawing, painting, book illustration, sculpture, landscape, architecture and film. We will examine the main events of the Holocaust through works of art created by perpetrators and victims, and through the many works of documentation, recollection, reflection and commemoration that have been created.

The Holocaust relates specifically to the oppression and murder of Jews during the years of Nazi ascendancy and throughout the Second World War, and most Holocaust-related art has been made by, for or about Jews. But we will also look at how these events have been represented by others for personal, moral and political purpose, and how artistic

motifs used to document and commemorate the Holocaust have now migrated into a wide range of commemorative contexts.

REL 320¹ India's Religions from Below (Hennigar; mahennig@syr.edu)

TTh 3:30-4:50 (meets with SAS 300 m001)

Caste is one of the most controversial and complicated social phenomena in South Asia. In this course, we will approach questions of caste by exploring the religious lives of communities who come from the bottom of the caste hierarchy. We will learn about how people live with, negotiate, and oppose caste through their religious practices. We will think carefully about these questions: What is the relationship between caste and religious identities? How does religion shape Indian communities and society? How can caste in India help us to think about inequality and religion more broadly? We will pursue these questions by examining case studies of religious groups active throughout different regions of India today including Hindu, Christian, and Buddhist communities. Our cases will allow us to delve deeply into issues like how religious practices and forms of discrimination change as people move from the village to the city, how people from low caste communities' myths and stories differ, how women's religious lives are affected by caste identity, and whether religious conversion movements can successfully defeat caste discrimination.

This course will give you the opportunity to gain some specific knowledge about complex social and religious lives in India, and it will also give you the opportunity to reflect on issues of social inequality and oppression in your own community. No prior background in South Asia studies is required.

REL 320² Sacred Sites and Indigenous Peoples (Gomez; abgomez@syr.edu)

MW 5:15-6:35

Indigenous religious, cultural, and political movements are deeply rooted in specific landscapes. Such places hold myths, memories, ceremonies, language, power, and the ancestral dead. Because of this, we cannot understand Indigenous peoples without the understanding meaning of their places, particularly those places deemed sacred. Today, many of these sites are endangered by forces of mining, tourism, urban development, archeological excavation, and various forms of land dispossession. In this class, we will explore both role of sacred sites in the religious lives of several Indigenous communities and strategic ways the category of religion is deployed (in court, protests, and other arenas) to protect these places. The course takes an in-depth study of local and global Indigenous political movements to protect sacred sites including Onondaga Lake, Oak Flat, Ohlone Shellmounds, Mauna Kea, and the #NoDAPL movement.

REL 320³ Video Gaming and Religion (Loewen; jbloewen@syr.edu)

TTh 5:00-6:20

This course examines the rich and meaningful conversations developing at the forefront of contemporary video game research. Using the study of religion as our guide, we will examine and critique the rhetoric and rules of video games that shape the ways we act, think, and feel about the world and our place in it.

Why religion? Video games have been fraught with religion both implicitly and explicitly from their very beginning, exploring questions concerned with moral value,

ultimate reality, sacred otherness, and what it means to be human. And, because technology is never neutral, video games are influencing who we are and how we live, whether we want them to or not. Like religion, they move us to particular actions, create spaces for meaning-making, and affect us mentally and emotionally in ways that reinforce and disrupt our own identities as well as the social structures that surround us.

REL 323 Christianity and Sexuality (Burrus; mvburrus@sy.edu)

MW 5:15-6:35 (cross-listed with QSX 323)

This course explores the highly contested terrain of Christian understandings of sexuality, with emphasis on the role of the Bible, doctrinal tradition, and the entry of new voices into the conversation. Our approach will be not dogmatic but inquisitive. Our questions will include: What is sexuality? What, for that matter, is Christianity, and who gets to say? Does Christianity have a distinctive understanding of sexuality? Does it make sense? Are virginity and asceticism erotic practices and/or sexual identities? How have figures of vice- sodomites, whores, homosexuals, masturbators, etc. – haunted Christian sexual imaginations, and to what effects? What roles do marriage and family, pleasure and joy play? *REL/QSX 323 is on the list of approved courses used to fulfill the Writing Intensive requirement.*

REL 333 Yiddish Literature in Translation (Frieden; kfrieden@sy.edu)

TTh 2:00-3:20

Survey of Yiddish literature, with special attention to the classic Yiddish authors, Yiddish theater, modernism, and Yiddish women writers. Themes of minority culture, class struggle, Hasidism, and the decline of the Shtetl.

HNR 340 M002 Writing, Scripture, Law (Watts; jwwatts@sy.edu) HONORS

MW 3:45-5:05

REL/MES/SAS 364 Enchanting Words: Muslim Poets, Singers, Storytellers (Kassam; tkassam@sy.edu)

ONLINE

Understand the power of words and language in Muslim cultures expressed in oral and literary genres including poetry, humor, fables, folksongs and travel journals. Explore key themes such as virtue, reality, divine and human nature.

REL 385 Religion in Chinese Society (Fisher; gfisher@sy.edu)

MW 5:15-6:35

This course will survey the diversity of religious practice in both mainland China and Taiwan from our earliest records to the present day. The course will focus on popular religious practices such as ancestor worship, the role of gods and ghosts, shamanism and divination, and sectarian cults and religious societies both within and separate from the traditions of Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism. A substantial portion of the course will focus on the role of religion in contemporary China. No prior background in East Asian studies is necessary. *REL 385 is on the list of approved courses used to fulfill the Writing Intensive requirement.*

REL 394/PHI 342 Theories of the Self (Abdel-Meguid; aelsayed@syr.edu)

MW 3:45-5:05

An exploration of major conceptions of the self, personal identity and human nature in philosophical and religious traditions. *REL 394 is on the list of courses that satisfy the Critical Reflections Requirement.*

REL/JSP/PHI 435 Modern Jewish Thought (Braiterman; zbraiter@syr.edu)

T 3:30-6:15

In this course, we critically explore core philosophical concepts in the philosophical writings of Martin Buber and Franz Rosenzweig. Topics include personal experience (sex, death, relation, dialogue), social identity (community, society, politics), and religious experience (the encounter with God, the performance of ritual, textual interpretation). Particular attention goes to human subjectivity and intersubjectivity, and to the role of art and imagination in relation to religion and reason. *REL/JSP/PHI 435 is on the list of approved courses used to fulfill the Writing Intensive requirement.*

REL 551 Ethics & Health Professions (Prescott; papresco@syr.edu)

W 4:30-7:00

Ethical theories in professional, organizational, and political-economic fields in health care. Specific issues: assisted suicide, professional codes, ethics of “cost-cutting” and justice with respect to care. *REL 551 is on the list of courses that satisfy the Critical Reflections Requirement.*

CONTINUING EDUCATION:

REL 103: Religion and Sports (Arnold; pparnold@syr.edu) – on-line

Religious beliefs and practices of native Americans; the diversity as well as similarity of religious expressions.

REL 191: Religion, Meaning & Knowledge (Mooney; efmooney@syr.edu) - online

The texts we read, from Camus to Basho, display Religion, Meaning, and Knowledge as part of our effort, individually and collectively, to shore up capacities for confidence and conviction against inevitable disappointments and suffering. Literature and art, religion and philosophy, offer resources for praise and gratitude despite daunting forces that can bring life to its knees. The evocations of religion, meaning and knowledge expose us to despair and hope, struggle and serenity, knowledge that defeats and knowledge that saves.