Religion

Religion is a powerful and dynamic force, influencing and shaping the world in which we live in diverse and complex ways. In the Department of Religion at Kalamazoo College, students learn about what it means to define religion as a field of inquiry. We offer traditions-based courses in Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, other religions of South and East Asia, and religious traditions in the Americas. We also offer courses on particular questions and methods, including religion and science, sexuality studies, women and feminist studies, material culture, transnationalism, and commodification. In all of our courses and in our own areas of research, we are committed to investigations of religion and religious experiences from a variety of angles, including questions of theology, history, linguistics, sociology, anthropology, texts, and philosophy. We examine religion in a comparative context, recognizing that religion reflects and is braided throughout economic, cultural, and political dimensions of human experience. The study of religion is challenging and invigorating because of the intersections and exchanges that unfold across different disciplines, traditions, and faith commitments.

Requirements for the Major in Religion

Number of Units
Eight units are required, not including the SIP. The major does not require a comprehensive exam nor a SIP in Religion.

Required Courses
Majors must complete at least four elective courses at the 200-level or above, in addition to both of the following courses:

- RELG 390 Junior Seminar in Religion
- RELG 490 Senior Seminar in Religion

We expect students to explore the diversity of religious traditions in close consultation with an advisor in the department.

Requirements for the Minor in Religion

Number of Units
Six units are required.

Required Courses
We expect minors to determine their array of courses in consultation with a member of the department. Minors must take at least three elective courses at the 200-level or above, and at least one of the two following courses:

- RELG 390 Junior Seminar in Religion
- RELG 490 Senior Seminar in Religion

Religion courses

**RELG/HIST 107 Introduction to Jewish Traditions**
This course explores the development of Judaism from its ancient origins until the present. We will discuss the biblical foundations of Judaism and the impact that different historical contexts have produced on its rituals and beliefs. This approach raises a number of questions, which we will keep in mind throughout the course: What is Judaism? Who are the Jews? What is the relationship between Judaism and "being Jewish"? How have historical circumstances shaped this relationship? What has changed and what has stayed the same, and why? The class will address these questions through discussions and readings.

**RELG 110 Introduction to the New Testament**
This course explores the writings of the New Testament, their relationship to the history and culture in which they were
produced, and their relevance to more recent issues in modern religious discourse. We will cover a range of topics, including the historical perspective on who Jesus was, the impact of Paul on Christianity, the formation of the canon, political religion in the Roman empire, ethics, and gender. We will apply several modern approaches as well as survey at various points the “afterlife” of the Christian scriptural traditions in Christianity. No prior knowledge of or experience with the subject is assumed or required.

**RELG 111 From Jesus to Christianity**
This class critically engages the various scholarly narratives that describe the rise of Christianity by taking a close look at the texts used to construct these narratives, often with particular attention to the role of Christian women. How did a single “Christianity” emerge from a welter of alternatives and possibilities? Or did it? How did thinkers from Paul to Saint Anthony navigate the diverse teachings, rituals and social practices associated with Jesus of Nazareth and his followers to produce a religious movement that was oppressed by Roman imperial authority, but later came to occupy that authority?

**RELG 120 Religion in the Early U.S.**
This course is an introduction to the early religious history of the part of the Americans that became the United. The time periods covered in this class are the 17th, 18th &amp; 19th centuries. Special attention is given to Native American displacement, the religions of enslaved West Africans, and the organizational activities of Euro-Americans.

**RELG 121 Religion in the Modern U.S.**
This course is an introduction to the religious landscape of the United States from the latter part of the 19th century through the contemporary period. Focus is placed on: the struggle of various Native American groups to keep their land and their traditions; Jim Crow and the Civil Rights fight; immigration; and the commodification of holidays and religious practices.

**RELG 122 Religions of Latin America**
This course introduces students to the diversity of religions in Latin America from colonialism to the present, especially focusing on how religious beliefs and practices are shaped by and located in their sociopolitical contexts. We will examine the relationship between Christianity, power, and empire and contemporary religious hybridity and innovation in Afro-Diasporic religions that shaped by histories of race, ethnicity, and slavery in the Caribbean. Latin America has been undergoing rapid religious transformation and we explore the boom in spirit-based faiths, and the relationship between personal conversion, healing and social change within contemporary contexts of poverty, imprisonment, and urbanization.

**RELG 123 Catholics in the Americas**
Burning convents. Urban riots. Confessionalists and Catacombs. Spectacular devotions. Saints in the streets. This course introduces students to Catholic life in the Americas, from colonial encounter to the present. By engaging with primary documents and ethnographic texts we explore the everyday texture of Catholic life and how Catholics negotiate issues of gender, sexuality, ethnicity, race, and immigration through devotions and religious rituals. This course encourages students to think about the global Church in its local and lived contexts. We will think critically together about the relationship between Catholicism and ideas of “Americanness” and national/ethnic/racial identity at different moments in history.

**RELG 130 Religion in South Asia**
The Indian subcontinent- which is made up of the modern countries of Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, the Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka- is one of the most religiously diverse regions in the entire world. Not only is South Asia the birthplace of the Hindu, Buddhist, Jain, Sikh religions, the region is also home to followers of Islamic, Christian, Jewish, and Zoroastrian traditions. This course will introduce you to the remarkably varied religious worlds of South Asia and the South Asian diaspora.

**RELG 140 Hindu Traditions**
This course is a basic introduction to the myriad of rituals, texts, practices, values and beliefs that make up Hindu Traditions in South Asia and beyond. This class covers early Hindu history and the various textual traditions, focuses on practices and divine interactions in the everyday lives of Hindus, and examines some of the historical and contemporary issues of conquest, integration, caste, migration and globalization.

**RELG 150 Buddhism in South Asia**
An examination of the historical development of the textual traditions, symbols, doctrines, myths, and communities of Buddhism throughout South Asia. Explores Buddhism's rise and decline in India and its development in Sri Lanka, Tibet, and other Southeast Asian countries through the modern period. This course uses primary sources as well as secondary, and students learn various ways to read texts in conjunction with other types of sources that include inscriptions, art historical materials, and archeological sources.

**RELG 160 Hebrew Bible**
This course explores the writings of the Hebrew Bible (Christian Old Testament and Jewish Tanak), their relationship to the history and culture in which they were produced, and their relevance to more recent issues in modern religious discourse. We cover a range of topics, including divine encounters, worship practices, sacred space, political religion, archaeology, ethics, and gender. We apply several modern approaches as well as survey at various points the "afterlife" of the Hebrew scriptural
traditions in Judaism and Christianity. No prior knowledge of or experience with the subject is assumed or required.

**RELG 170 Muhammad and the Qur'an**
In this course, we focus on the rise of Islam as a religious tradition. We ask the following questions: Who was Muhammad? How did Islam come to emerge as a defined religious tradition? What traditions influenced the establishment of the early Muslim community? What is the Qur'an? The final question asked in this course is how we should study Islam. This course examines pre-Islamic origins in the Middle East through 692.

**RELG 171 Islam in South Asia**
While many Americans tend to think that most Muslims live in the Middle East (the birthplace of Islam), it is South Asia that has the largest population of Muslims in the world. In fact, one third of all Muslims live in Afghanistan, Pakistan, India, Nepal, Bhutan, Bangladesh, the Maldives, and Sri Lanka. This course offers a broad historical survey of the Islamic cultures of the Indian subcontinent from the beginning of the Delhi Sultanate up until the present day. After a detailed introduction to the core beliefs and practices of Islam, we will jump into an exploration of the history of Islam in South Asia, interactions between Muslim and non-Muslim religious communities in South Asia, and the contemporary concerns of South Asian Muslims. We will especially focus on Islamic culture in South Asia in the realms of literature, the visual arts, architecture, music, and material culture.

**RELG 200 Religion and Science**
This course is a historical and contemporary look into the relationships between religion and science. Beginning with the development of science as an independent system of inquiry and also with the evolving and multiple definitions of religion, this class will trace the contours, the moments of cooperation and the fault-lines of discourse between religion and science. This class seeks to cultivate nuanced and more subtle understanding of religious and scientific viewpoints, and the ways in which they intersect.

**RELG 204 Feminist Studies in Religion**
This course explores questions that lie at the intersections of the ideas about women, men, and gender in the academic study of religion. We examine the transformation of scholarship about religion based on feminist studies in of religion. We look first at the academic study of religion, and then at the experiences of women and men in different religious traditions, and move to more complex questions about the ways in which the lives of women and men are shaped by gendered categories. We pay particular attention to issues of identity, voice, history, and agency.

*Prerequisite: Previous coursework in Religion is desirable, but not required.*

**RELG 205 Religion and Masculinity in the U.S.**
This course explores how masculinity is constructed and performed in religious communities, rituals, and practices. It provides a solid theoretical grounding in theories of masculinity and gender performativity from philosophical, sociological and historical lenses. We then delve into case studies to consider how masculinity and religion formed men's experiences of war, imaginings of God, race, and family. We consider an array of religious communities/movements in 20th century and contemporary America, from the Muscular Christianity movement to Muslim masculinities to Pentecostal Latino masculinities, interrogating the ways religious beliefs and practices create and maintain gendered bodies.

**RELG 210 Sex and the Bible**
This course is about sex and interpretation, focusing primarily on how Christians have interpreted the Bible around questions of human sexuality. The questions that we will consider are: What does it mean to say a particular view of sexuality and sexual behavior is "biblical" given the sheer variety of possible interpretations? How have changing notions of human sexuality affected the way that the biblical text is understood and deployed? We will explore these questions by reading key biblical texts from the Hebrew Bible and New Testament and their interpretation by thinkers from antiquity up to the present. Topics to be covered include marriage, gender, desire, same-sex relationships, and sexual renunciation.

*Prerequisite: Previous course(s) in the Department of Religion recommended but not required.*

**RELG/SEMN 213 Christianity &amp; the Family**
This course critically addresses contemporary debates about the centrality of the family in Christian teaching through a historical and cross-cultural survey. What is the relationship between Christianity and the various approaches to kinship and family in different cultures in different historical contexts? Where did our contemporary ideas about the family come from and what are Christians saying about new forms of kinship? From the Bible to present day debates about divorce, sex, and same sex marriage, Christians have never embraced a single understanding of the family, but rather have been influenced by broader cultural shifts in how kinship is done. This course is a Shared Passages Sophomore Seminar.

*Prerequisite: Sophomores Only*

**RELG 214 Race and the Bible**
This course examines the intersection of the concept of "Race and the Bible" (Hebrew Bible and Christian New Testament) from a variety of methods and perspectives. This course looks at the historical critical study of the Bible's treatment of ethnic division and slavery, as well as in the contexts of ancient Judaism and early Christianity. This course also looks at the reception of biblical texts and narratives, primarily in an American context, to think about colonialism, slavery, and racial
politics. Finally, this course considers the debates about the relevance and the moral meaning and message of the Bible in addressing contemporary issues of racism.

**RELG/HIST 218 American Jewish Experience**
This course will explore the religious, social, political, cultural, and economic history of the Jewish people in America from the first settlement until the present. The major themes of study will focus upon the development of Judaism in America. We will take into account a number of historical factors that shaped that development: the economic, social, and political evolution of American Jewry and its institutions; Jewish immigration to the United States and its consequences; American Jewish self-perception; and the relationship between Jews and non-Jews in American society. Assignments will draw upon a wide range of materials, from secondary historical studies and primary documents to fiction and film.

**RELG 221 Black Religious Experiences in the Americas**
When enslaved people were forced over the Atlantic from West Africa to the Americas, they did not arrive as blank slates. While the Middle Passage was horrific and tragic, humans are resilient, and during the darkest of times, divinity, rituals, practices and beliefs are not only questioned but also embraced. This class will look at which religious traditions were rejected and which were embraced among the enslaved of the Americas. In order to do this, we follow the journey of these slaves, from West Africa to the Caribbean and to the plantations and the urban centers of the Americas. We will also examine the religious, economic, social, political and liberative changes that Black Americans experienced after the various independence movements in the Americas through to the contemporary period.

*Prerequisite: Sophomore standing.*

**RELG 222 Urban Religion**
Cities are sites of convergence, creativity, and encounter. This course explores how religious communities dynamically engage with cityscapes and their diverse populations. We consider how religious, ethnic, and racial identities are mapped onto urban space, and how people creatively adapt their religious practices to the architectural, spatial constraints of the city. How do religious communities invest neighborhoods/city spaces with sacred meaning? How do immigrants maintain connections to their ancestral homes and spirits in new built environments? We then examine competition and boundary-making between different religious, racial and ethnic communities, and the violence and contestation that occurs over neighborhood space.

**RELG 231 Religion, Bollywood, and Beyond**
South Asia is one of the most religiously diverse regions of the world where Hindu, Buddhist, Jain, Sikh Islamic, Christian, Jewish, and Zoroastrian traditions have co-existed for centuries. In the past one hundred years, however, the region has also become known for its history of religious conflict or communalism. This course examines the depictions of religious harmony and religious conflict in HindiUrdu and Tamil films from India. We will pay particular attention to movies from “Bollywood” one of the oldest and largest film industries in the world. We will begin with historical fiction films that depict real figures from South Asian history such as Alauddin Khalji, Akbar, and Bhagat Singh. We will then turn to cinematic depictions of the Partition of India and Pakistan in 1947 during which countless Hindus, Muslims, and Sikhs were displaced and killed. We will also investigate how other major events such as the demolition of the Babri Masjid in 1992 and the Godhra train burning in 2002 and their aftermaths have been presented in Indian cinema.

**RELG 235 Devotional Stuff**
Skin. Blood. Bone. Dirt. Electricity. This course explores how religion is more about bodies, objects, and stuff than doctrine or belief. We examine how gods, spirits, and the dead become really present to devotees, how they are efficacious and animated. From skeletons and relics, to shrines and food, materiality is central to how people interact with and make the sacred. Not separate from the messy realms of everyday life, religion is often erotic, practiced in kitchens, and reliant on technologies. This course will introduce students to the study of material culture, sensation, and embodiment, to explore how things make us as much as we make things.

**RELG/WGS 241 Princesses, Demonesses, and Warriors**
The Ramayana and the Mahabharata are two ancient Sanskrit epic poems. For the past two thousand years, the Ramayana and the Mahabharata have been retold countless times by different poets, artists, playwrights, novelists, television producers, and filmmakers throughout South and Southeast Asia and the Diaspora. The creators of these Ramayanas and Mahabharatas include women, Hindus, Buddhists, Jains, Muslims, Sikhs, Christians, and members of low caste and indigenous groups. In this course, you will be introduced to the diverse and complex worlds of the Ramayana and Mahabharata narrative traditions through the close examination of eight different female characters in several retellings of these two epics. We will read excerpts from the Sanskrit Ramayana and the Sanskrit Mahabharata as well as a play, poems, short stories, and folk songs. We will also watch films and episodes from television shows. The Ramayanas and Mahabharatas that we will encounter in this class were created in eight different languages.

**RELG 250 Buddhism in East Asia**
An examination of the historical development of the textual traditions, symbols, doctrines, myths, and communities of Buddhism throughout East Asia. Explores the introduction and establishment of Buddhism in China, Korea, and Japan, and
compares the different schools of Buddhism that developed in dialogue with Daoism and Shinto.

RELG 251 Buddhas and Buddhist Philosophies
This course begins with an examination of the biography of Gautama Buddha, the founder of Buddhism. Focusing first on the traditions of Theravada Buddhism, we explore the construction of the Buddha's life story with attention to the Buddha as a model for the attainment of nirvana. We turn next to the explosion of Buddhas in Mahayana Buddhism and to the fundamental categories of the teachings of the Buddha. Questions at the center of this course are: Why have the teachings changed over time and throughout the spread of Buddhism throughout Asia? What remains "Buddhist" throughout the centuries? We examine these questions by examining the teachings of Theravada and Mahayana Buddhism using primary sources.

Prerequisite: One previous RELG course or Instructor permission.

RELG 252 Radical Dharma: Black Buddhism in the Us
In the last two decades in the United States, we have seen an exciting growth of writings and practices among Black Buddhists, with accompanying critiques of whiteness and racism among Buddhist practitioners. The title of this course is taken from a book that explore race, gender, sexuality in the United States, and has emerged in popular discourse as a term denoting the use of critical race theory and Buddhism.

Prerequisite: Must have taken one course in Religion or with instructor permission.

RELG 262 Hinduism
Exploration of the foundations of Hinduism, focusing on the textual corpus of the Vedas, Upanisads and Epics, with a focus on lineage and diversity of ritual practices. Special attention is given to practice and the roles for women. The course includes classical and contemporary traditions. AOS(RELG); CR(Asia)

Prerequisite: Sophomore standing, one religion course or permission.

RELG/HIST 263 Jews in a Changing Europe, 1750-1880
Between 1780 and 1880 enormous changes took place in Jewish religious, political, social, intellectual, and economic life. These changes worked in tandem with developments in general European life to create new forces within Judaism and new ways of looking at the connections between Jews. In this course, we will study these developments as they affected the Jews on the European continent. In so doing, we will explore their consequences for both Jews and non-Jews, and the issues and questions they raised.

RELG/HIST 264 Jewish Revolutions: 1881-1967
Between 1881 and the period immediately following the Second World War, the world's Jews experienced momentous demographic, religious, political, economic, and social changes. These changes in turn shaped their relationship to non-Jews with whom they lived. This course will study the context of change across the globe from Europe and America to the Middle East and North Africa. Through primary and secondary documents, we will explore the forces that produced these changes and the results they produced for both Jews and non-Jews.

RELG/HIST 265 Zionism: From Idea to State
This course explores the origins, development, and manifestations of Zionism. The course examines the transformation of traditional religious conceptions of the connection between Jews and the Land of Israel (Palestine) into a nationalist ideology in the 19th century. This transformation entailed parallel changes to the idea of Jewish peoplehood. Through the use of primary documents we will follow these trends through intellectual, religious, social, and political changes that culminated in the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948.

RELG/HIST 267 Women and Judaism
This course explores the religious and social position women have historically occupied in Jewish society. We will discuss religious practice and theological beliefs as well as social and economic developments as a means of addressing questions such as: What role have women played in Jewish tradition? How are they viewed by Jewish law? How has their status changed in different historical contexts, and why might those changes have taken place? What are contemporary ideas about the status of Jewish women, and how have these ideas influenced contemporary Jewish practices and communal relations? What do the historical and religious experiences of Jewish women teach us about the way that Judaism has developed?

RELG/HIST/AFST 274 Islam in Africa

It will examine themes in Jewish history and culture as expressed through the medium of film. Through readings, lectures, and class discussions, students will explore issues such as assimilation and acculturation, anti-Semitism, group cohesion, interfaith relations, Zionism, and the Holocaust. We will consider questions, such as: How are Jewish characters portrayed on film? Which elements of these portrayals change over time, and which remain constant? How do these cultural statements speak to the historical contexts that produced them? What choices do filmmakers make regarding the depiction of Jewish life, and how do those choices influence perceptions of Jews in particular, or minorities generally? This course is a Shared Passages Sophomore Seminar.

Prerequisite: Sophomores Only
This course explores the spread of Islam from the Arabian Peninsula to the African continent in the seventh century through the nineteenth century and limns the factors, which facilitated this advance. It examines the methods and principles of Islam and how the religion affected the life styles of its African neophytes and adherents. Because of the interaction between Muslim and African civilizations, the advance of Islam has profoundly influenced religious beliefs and practices of African societies, while local traditions have also influenced Islamic practices. Muslims were important in the process of state building and in the creation of commercial networks that brought together large parts of the continent. Muslim clerics served as registrars of state records and played a role in developing inner-state diplomacy inside Africa and beyond.

**RELG/HIST 275/SEMN 274 African Christianity**
This course explores the complex and disparate trends of Christianity in Africa since the first century C. E. It highlights Africa's role in the development and growth of Christianity as a global religion.

**Prerequisite:** Sophomores Only

**RELG 280 Spirituality, Money, & Travel**
Travel and spirituality are well-established companions. The practice of pilgrimage is found on every continent, and taking a vacation to a particularly exotic locale to look at Buddhist temples, for example, is an increasingly common practice. Furthermore, travel is commonly assumed to be a function of economic surplus. Yet in the 1970s and subsequent decades, "backpack travel" emerged as low-cost alternatives, particularly to developing countries. This course examines the development of travel within a contemporary understanding of developing neoliberal economies and the academic study of spirituality and religion, analyzing the emergence of spiritual tourism and the costs for such enterprises.

**RELG 390 Junior Seminar in Religion**
The study of religion is comprised of a set of intersecting questions and issues with its roots in the nineteenth century. This course is designed to introduce students to those questions, to wrestle with those questions again. There is no single definition of religion, but there are conversations and questions that rest at the heart of the academic study of religion. The goal of this course is to learn how to consider religious experiences as aspects of dynamic and evolving interactions between thought and action, the immediate world and that which lies beyond, and individuals and communities. A significant part of the course involves writing a research prospectus to best prepare the student to write a SIP in the Religion Department. This course is required for religion majors in their junior year and for students who want to write their SIP in the Religion Department. Minors are required to take either this course in their junior year or RELG490, the Senior Seminar in Religion, in their senior year.

**Prerequisite:** Two courses in Religion and Junior standing or permission

**RELG/ANSO 395 Religion and Capitalism**
Relationships between religion and capitalism influence our lives in multifaceted ways. Religion plays a crucial role not only in formation of identities, social interactions and communities but also in work experiences, political engagement and social activism. In this course, we will explore critical approaches to address how individuals and social groups both mediate and get affected by these dynamic affiliations between religion and capitalism. We will build on critical social theorists like Marx, Weber, Foucault, and Gramsci to focus on religious and neoliberal discourses at work, the role of religion in political mobilization and hegemony, and religion in resistance to capitalism.

**Prerequisite:** Must have taken at least one 200-level ANSO class.

**RELG 490 Senior Seminar in Religion**
Students examine a variety of theories of religion and use them to consider retrospectively some of the topics already considered in their various courses undertaken as part of their concentration. Designed as the capstone seminar for majors and minors, to be taken during the senior year. Required for religion majors in their senior year. Minors are required to take either this course in their senior year or RELG390, the Junior Seminar in Religion, in their junior year.

**Prerequisite:** Senior Religion majors and minors or permission of instructor

**RELG 593 Senior Integrated Project**
Each program or department sets its own requirements for Senior Integrated Projects done in that department, including the range of acceptable projects, the required background of students doing projects, the format of the SIP, and the expected scope and depth of projects. See the Kalamazoo Curriculum &gt; Senior Integrated Project section of the Academic Catalog for more details.

**Prerequisite:** Permission of department and SIP supervisor required.
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