

KALAMAZOO COLLEGE
2017-2018 ACADEMIC CATALOG

Religion

Professors: Anderson, Haus, Maldonado-Estrada, Petrey (Chair)

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 & 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. U.S. Religious History I is NOT a prerequisite of this class.

RELG 122 Religions of Latin America

Using an array of primary and secondary materials, we will look into the myriad of dynamics that make up the religious histories and narratives of Latin America. This course has been organized into seven loosely chronological themes, which will touch on various parts of the geographic region. These themes are: 1 - Pre-Columbian Religions; 2 - Encounter & Conquest; 3 - Slavery & Religion; 4 - Rebellion & Revolution; 5 - Progressive Catholicism; 6 - Protestant Challenges; and 7 - Continuous Diversity.

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 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 201/ARTX 205/SEM 205 Religious Art and Material Culture

This course explores the relationship between religion and art. The arts, whether in the form of painting, sculpture, architecture or kitsch, are often vehicles for religious devotion and expression. At the same time, devotion to a divine figure has inspired some of the world's most beautiful pieces of art. Religion and art form a symbiotic relationship which can simultaneously be in tension and/or cohesive. Looking at various primary and secondary sources from a variety of religious traditions, we explore this tension and cohesion, which can be a window into larger societal and cultural issues. Given that we live in a mechanical age, special attention will be paid to the material production of religious kitsch and the place of religious art in the market. This course is a Shared Passages Sophomore Seminar.

Prerequisite: Sophomores Only

RELG 202/SEMN 230 Same Sex, Gender, and Religion

This sophomore seminar explores the intersection of religions, same-sex affection/love/relations, and the category of gender. At the most basic level we examine what different religions have to say about sexuality, in particular, non-heterosexualities. We look at the role that gender plays in these constructions of these sexualities, and we return to our starting point to analyze the role of religions in these constructions of gender and same-sex sexualities, affections, love, and/or relations. This course is a Shared Passages Sophomore Seminar.

Prerequisite: Sophomores Only

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 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 211 Religion From Alexander to Constantine

This course examines various forms of ancient religion and worship in the classical world. Topics included are concepts of divinity, varieties of religious space and practices, distinctions between civic and private worship, religious festivals and rituals, attitudes towards death and afterlife, importations of Near-Eastern and African religions, and political and philosophical appropriations of religion. Specifically, the course will focus on classical Greek and Roman religion, new religious movements, Judaism, and Christianity within classical culture. Students will become acquainted with a variety of texts, archaeological sites, and religious art and artifacts. (This is a designated Greek and Roman literature or culture course in Classics.)

RELG 212 Contemporary Biblical Studies

Since the rise of the modern era in the 18th c., scholars have read the Bible as a historical text that can reveal something about ancient history. This method portrayed itself as an objective historical alternative to the theological readings informed by tradition and dogma. In the postmodern era, scholars have begun to read the Bible differently, revealing not only the political interests of so-called objective history of the Bible, but also articulating new ways of readings these texts. This course examines a bit of the history of biblical studies, but pays particular attention to feminist, queer, African American, and post-colonial biblical studies from recent decades.

Prerequisite: RELG-110 RELG-111 or RELG-160

RELG/SEMN 213 Christianity & 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/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 220 Catholicism in the Americas

This class is a history of the diverse groups of people and practices that make up the various Catholic communities of the Americas. We will examine Catholic history, life, practices and beliefs through four sections: Colonialism, Saints & Syncretism; Immigration & Rebellion; Social Justice; and the Church in Crisis. Throughout this class, special attention will not only be given to the hierarchy, but to the laity - how do Catholics live and how do they practice their devotion in their day-to-day lives. By taking an Americas approach we will be tapping into a larger framework of Catholic history and seeing the ways in which Catholicism shaped the Americas in the past and is an important part of American life in the present.

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 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 260/CLAS 261 Judaism in Antiquity

This course examines the history and literature of Judaism from the Second Temple Period to the beginnings of Rabbinical Judaism (400 BCE - 400 CE). This course explores the diversity of ancient Judaism and explores themes of religious and cultural identity. We shall consider the political and religious implications for Jews living under the Persian, Greek, Roman, and Christian empires, while briefly ruling themselves in the Hasmonean period. We will read a series of primary sources in translation from ancient Jews and non-Jews, as well as modern scholarly treatments of these works.

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/SEM/N/HIST 268 Jews on Film

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

RELG 270 Islam in the Modern World

This course examines the diversity of Islam throughout the world, keeping in mind that there are many different faces of Islam. This course presumes some familiarity with the fundamentals of Islam -- Sunni and Shia -- as well as Sufi traditions, with an examination of the Sufi mystical traditions and the roles of women. Finally, we examine the impact of colonialism on Islam in the Middle East as a way to explore the historical and religious contexts of our understanding of Islam today.

RELG/HIST/AFST 274 Islam in Africa

This course explores the spread of Islam from the Arab 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. As a result 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/SEM/N 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 295 Religion & Sexuality in the US

Using theoretical works, historical case studies, and present-day events, we explore how ideas about religion and sexuality have been constructed in U.S. history, how religion and sexuality shape one another, and how the regulation of religion and the regulation of sexuality in U.S. society are intertwined. As we examine our case studies, which move from the colonial era to the present, we will also explore some of the key terms that guide the studies of religion and sexuality, including gender, ritual, and confession. By the end of the course, students will have a familiarity with both theoretical and historical elements of the study of religion and sexuality.

Prerequisite: One previous course at the 100 level in Religion highly recommended

RELG 295 Race, Religion, and Migration in the US

This course explores religion, race, and migration in North American history. Through a series of case studies and theoretical readings, we will explore how ideas about race and religion shaped American understandings of who had a right to migrate from place to place; whose movements were worthy of mention in historical accounts, and which movements were seen as good or bad, legal or illegal, noble or menacing. Though our focus will be on the United States and its controversies

surrounding migration, we will also seek to historicize how U.S. boundaries came to be fixed where they are today, and how religious and racial groups span those boundaries.

Prerequisite: One previous course at the 100 level in Religion highly recommended.

RELG 295 Love in a Dead Language

In the religious and cultural history of South Asia, poetry, drama and epic were one of the primary means by which religions were lived and imagined. There was no distinction between "secular" and "religious" literature; the same poem that one might read for pleasure, another would read to cultivate devotion to god or learn how to live an ethical life. The 'ancient authorities' of the Hindu tradition declared Four Goals proper for a human life: love, profit, duty and liberation. This course focuses on the first goal, love (kama), and the literature of love written in Sanskrit during the early medieval period. This course will examine five major genres of Sanskrit literature-epic, drama, extended poetry, poetic miniature, and song.

Prerequisite: One previous course at the 100 level in Religion highly recommended.

RELG 295 Race and Islam in America

This course traces the experiences of Muslims in North America from the sixteenth century to the present, with special focus on Islam in America after 9/11. It places particular emphasis on how Muslims have shaped American life and culture, how Muslim communities have been racialized in U.S. discourse, and how Muslims have sought to re-define their racial and religious identities in a U.S. context, particularly after the rise of the War on Terror.

RELG 295 Religion and Social Struggle

This course examines twentieth and twenty-first century social struggles through a religious lens. Karl Marx famously described religion as the "opiate of the masses." In practice, however, religion has been a resource for resistance as well as a mechanism of control. Drawing on case studies from the U.S. and Latin America, this course analyses how both sides of a conflict understand and deploy religious concepts. This course will examine how power and religion intersect, how those outside power structures mobilize religion, and how religions change in different conditions. This course will also analyze such contemporary movements as the War on Terror and Black Lives Matter.

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 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 Individualized Project

Each program or department sets its own requirements for Senior Individualized 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 -> Curriculum Details and Policies section of the Academic Catalog for more details.

Prerequisite: Permission of department and SIP supervisor required.

The Academic Catalog contains the most accurate information available at the time of publication. Statements contained therein are not contractual obligations, and verbal or other representations that are inconsistent with or not contained within the catalogues' offerings or policies are not binding. Kalamazoo College reserves the right to change, without specific notice, offerings, policies, procedures, qualifications, fees, and other conditions.

This content was last updated on May 14 2018.