

RELIGIOUS STUDIES

Faculty

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Associate Professors: Brantley Gasaway, John Penniman, Stuart Young

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The academic study of religion equips students to analyze one of the most powerful and contested forces in the world. Our discipline fosters a deep understanding of different cultures, increases student sensitivity to the ambiguities and complexities of human existence, and encourages thoughtful and engaged citizenship in our interconnected world. Religious studies sits at the heart of a liberal arts education.

The mission of the religious studies department is to provide Bucknell students with the capacity to interpret how religion shapes and is shaped by our world. We pursue this mission through a transdisciplinary, trans-cultural, and trans-historical curriculum. Because the category of religion is itself entangled with the living legacies of colonialism, we are committed to interrogating how these legacies continue to shape the field. Our courses offer students opportunities to study a diverse spectrum of the world's religious traditions; to grapple with enduring questions of human meaning and purpose; and to cultivate the habits of intellectual exploration and resources of ethical reasoning necessary for lifelong learning about religion. The religious studies curriculum sharpens student skill sets in critical thinking, close reading, independent research, analytical writing and persuasive oral communication. As a result, our current students are prepared for multiple career pathways, and our alumni have distinguished themselves in a variety of professional fields. This mission is driven by faculty who actively pursue research at the cutting edge of the discipline, advancing knowledge about religion within their areas of expertise and to the broader public.

Major in Religious Studies

The religious studies **major** consists of at least eight courses:

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| One 100-level course in Religious Studies | 1 |
| At least four 200-level courses in Religious Studies | 4 |
| RELI 232 What is Religion? Theories and Methods | 1 |
| At least one 300-level course in Religious Studies | 1 |
| Completion of Culminating Experience ¹ | 1 |
| Total Credits | 8 |

¹ Culminating Experience can be either another 300-level course, an independent study project with a faculty advisor in the department or a senior honors thesis.

RELI 232 and 300-level courses will address the writing, speaking and information literacy requirements of the CASCC.

Religious studies majors are encouraged to pursue off-campus study either abroad or in approved domestic programs to broaden their understanding of religious pluralism both globally and in the United States. No more than two religion courses earned off campus may be used to meet the major requirements. Transfer students may appeal this restriction by writing to the chair of the department.

The religious studies department encourages majors to consider honors candidacy by completing an honors thesis in their final academic year. Students wishing to undertake an honors thesis should consult with their adviser in the fall semester of their junior year and declare their intentions and their thesis topic in the spring semester of their junior year.

Minor in Religious Studies

The **minor** in Religious Studies consists of four elective courses, at least one of which must be a 300-level seminar.

The **learning goals** of the religious studies major include:

1. Majors have general competence in key approaches and concepts in the academic study of religion.
2. Majors have the written and oral communication skills necessary to articulate ideas effectively and persuasively in religious studies.
3. Majors have the information literacy and critical thinking skills necessary to conduct independent research in religious studies.
4. Students gain a critical foundation for religious literacy.

Courses

RELI 100. Introduction to Religion. 1 Credit.

Offered Both Fall and Spring; Lecture hours:3

This course will introduce students to the academic study of religion to provide a foundation for religious literacy. Multiple sections of this course are offered every semester, under a variety of titles.

RELI 200. Buddhism. 1 Credit.

Offered Either Fall or Spring; Lecture hours:3,Other:1

An interdisciplinary introduction to Buddhism, including basic teachings of liberation from suffering, impermanence, no-self, ethics, and meditation. Also explores the historical development of various streams of Buddhism in Asia and the West, with attention to the mutual influence between Buddhism and society, politics, and material culture. Crosslisted as EAST 251.

RELI 201. Islam. 1 Credit.

Offered Occasionally; Lecture hours:3

An overview of the many cultural expressions of Islam, which emerged in the 6th century and spread from Arabia to the larger world. The course will cover Muhammad as prophet, Qur'an as scripture, Hadith as religious narrative, and tensions between law, modernity, and mysticism.

RELI 202. Hinduism. 1 Credit.

Offered Either Fall or Spring; Lecture hours:3

A historical survey of Hindu religious traditions. This course traces the development of Hindu scriptures, rituals, philosophies, and ethics from the ancient to the contemporary world. Concepts such as karma, yoga, and reincarnation will be put in the broader contexts of Hindu dharma (religious law), theism, and ritual.

RELI 207. Holocaust: Event and Reception. 1 Credit.

Offered Either Fall or Spring; Lecture hours:3; Repeatable

During the Holocaust more than six million Jews, one third of the Jewish population of the world, were systematically killed. We study the event, reflections by major thinkers and scholars, and the aftermath of the Holocaust.

RELI 209. Israel: Land, People, and Tradition. 1 Credit.

Offered Occasionally; Lecture hours:3

Study of the complex relationship between Judaism and the sacred traditions of the Jews as related to the Land of Israel including the cultural situation and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

RELI 210. Judaism. 1 Credit.

Offered Occasionally; Lecture hours:3

A survey of Jewish religious traditions, addressing major historical developments (e.g., biblical, rabbinic, and modern periods) and basic rituals and theological issues (e.g., "chosenness", covenant, salvation).

RELI 212. Christianity. 1 Credit.

Offered Occasionally; Lecture hours:3

A broad introduction to Christianity, including a survey of Christian scripture, various Christian doctrines and beliefs, and major traditions of thought and practice within Christianity.

RELI 214. God, Nature, and Knowledge. 1 Credit.

Offered Either Fall or Spring; Lecture hours:3

Study of various philosophical, religious, and scientific theories regarding the concept of divine nature, human nature, and non-human nature.

RELI 216. Philosophy of Religion. 1 Credit.

Offered Either Fall or Spring; Lecture hours:3

Problems for rational inquiry arising from the claims and practices of religious faith, e.g., the nature of religious language, arguments for the existence of God, the concept of evil. Crosslisted as PHIL 223.

RELI 222. Images of Jerusalem. 1 Credit.

Offered Either Fall or Spring; Lecture hours:3

This is a writing class (W2) focusing on Jerusalem (Israel), its history, as a pilgrimage site, and the three Western religions (Judaism, Christianity, Islam) in the city.

RELI 224. Global Religions and the Politics of Pluralism. 1 Credit.

Offered Occasionally; Lecture hours:3

Explores the presence and practice of global relations and analyzes the cultural and political challenges of religious pluralism. Students will examine a wide variety of religious traditions, assess how minority religions negotiate issues of acculturation, and evaluate the political problems often created by religious diversity. Prerequisite: permission of the instructor.

RELI 226. Environmental Ethics. 1 Credit.

Offered Either Fall or Spring; Lecture hours:3

A survey of the major theories of environmental ethics, with particular attention to the challenge of developing an ethic commensurate with increasing human power. Crosslisted as ENST 236.

RELI 232. What is Religion? Theories and Methods. 1 Credit.**Offered Either Fall or Spring; Lecture hours:3**

Exploration of theoretical models and methods in religious studies. Readings from major texts may include sociological, psychological, anthropological and phenomenological approaches, along with challenges to such theories from thinkers of feminist, postmodern and postcolonial perspectives.

RELI 234. Issues of Religion and Culture. 1 Credit.**Offered Occasionally; Lecture hours:3,Other:1; Repeatable**

Focus on interdependence of religion and cultural phenomena: ideology; alienation; formation of world view; understandings of time and space; relation between church and state; faith and science.

RELI 235. Religion and Popular Culture. 1 Credit.**Offered Either Fall or Spring; Lecture hours:3**

This course examines the relationship of religion to contemporary popular culture, both in how religion is portrayed (in music, movies, sports, and consumer culture) and how it is replicated (in ritual, myth, and morality).

RELI 236. Drinking Coffee, Tasting God. 1 Credit.**Offered Occasionally; Lecture hours:3**

This course is an introduction to the mystical path of Islam, Sufism, and its transformation across time and place. It will cover Sufism's major figures, institutions, genres, its global expansion and adaptation, as well as its use of art, music, and, most importantly, coffee.

RELI 237. Judaism in Film. 1 Credit.**Offered Either Fall or Spring; Lecture hours:3**

This is an introduction to Judaism in Film. Judaism has been characterized as a culture, a civilization, a philosophy, a nation, an ethnic group, and a religion. In this introductory class we will discuss ritual, ethical and historical issues.

RELI 241. Religion and the Loss of Traditional Faith. 1 Credit.**Offered Occasionally; Lecture hours:3**

Examination of new approaches (linguistical, philosophical, and hermeneutical) that challenge traditional Western religious ideas and the role of faith in contemporary world. Emphasis is on intersection of religion and critical theory.

RELI 242. Religious Naturalism. 1 Credit.**Offered Either Fall or Spring; Lecture hours:3**

This course will examine some of the diverse perspectives and ideas associated with religious naturalism. Students will explore the ways religious naturalists reconceptualize traditional concepts (God or supernatural theism), and examine their various approaches to understanding evil, morality, human nature, and humans' connectivity to nature.

RELI 245. Chinese Communist Religion. 1 Credit.**Offered Either Fall or Spring; Lecture hours:3**

This course focuses on religion in modern China under the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party. It examines the development of Buddhism, Taoism, popular religions, and western religions in China, from ancient times to the present day, against the backdrop of political ideology that traditionally deems religion "the opiate of the masses." Crosslisted as EAST 252.

RELI 250. How to Be Alone: Religion, Solitude, and Loneliness. 1 Credit.**Offered Either Fall or Spring; Lecture hours:3**

An exploration of the diverse meanings, effects and cultural significance of being alone. This course engages philosophical and religious traditions that view solitude as a valuable practice rather than a problem to solve. It also considers the loneliness epidemic in America and various responses to it.

RELI 252. New Testament and Christian Origins. 1 Credit.**Offered Either Fall or Spring; Lecture hours:3**

An exploration of the earliest Christians through the writings that later became the New Testament. We will examine these sources in the context of their specific social and historical concerns and consider the complex process in which some writings were included in Christian scripture while others were rejected. Crosslisted as CLAS 252.

RELI 253. Dying for God: Martyrdom from Antigone to ISIS. 1 Credit.**Offered Either Fall or Spring; Lecture hours:3**

Early Christians were attracted to dramatic narratives of suffering—whether about spectacular deaths in the arena or extreme self-denial in the desert. This course explores the world of martyrs and monks and considers how ancient ideals about pain, gender, and sexuality continue to influence Christian thinking about holiness and sainthood. Crosslisted as CLAS 235 and WMST 245.

RELI 256. Islam in America. 1 Credit.**Offered Either Fall or Spring; Lecture hours:3**

This course introduces the history of Islam and Muslims in America starting from the first enslaved Muslims who were brought to the colonies to the present. It will also review US political and social relations with Muslim majority regions as well as Islam's role in the discourse of American power.

RELI 257. Yoga: Religion, History, Culture. 1 Credit.**Offered Either Fall or Spring; Lecture hours:3**

Far from a new age health trend, yoga arose in the Indian subcontinent two millennia ago. This course explores the religion, history, and culture of yoga by reading classical yoga texts; examining the rise of guru-based yoga lineages and the development of postural yoga; and studying yoga's recent global spread.

RELI 260. Women, Gender, Islam. 1 Credit.**Offered Either Fall or Spring; Lecture hours:3**

An exploration of how Muslims have conceived of and performed gender, both historically and today. Counter to the trope that "Islam oppresses women," we will consider an array of gendered dynamics that characterize Muslim societies. We will also examine the geopolitical contexts that contribute to this trope to begin with. Crosslisted as WMST 260.

RELI 262. Islamic Law. 1 Credit.**Offered Either Fall or Spring; Lecture hours:3**

An introduction to Islamic law, examining how it developed, how it works and how it has shaped Muslim societies, past and present. In exploring these topics, students will engage with a wide range of sources, including legal theory, fatwas (legal opinions) and court cases.

RELI 276. Judaism and Masculinity. 1 Credit.**Offered Occasionally; Lecture hours:3**

Theories of Judaism, masculinity and maleness applied to the bodies of athletes; Jewish/Black bodies; the body of soldiers; stereotyping; human and divine bodies; Jewish feet, nose, ideal bodies.

RELI 279. Judaism and Law. 1 Credit.**Offered Occasionally; Lecture hours:3**

Explores the cultural and ethical complexities of Jewish Law in the U.S., Europe, and the unique legal system of the state of Israel.

RELI 280. Religion and Constitutional Law. 1 Credit.**Offered Either Fall or Spring; Lecture hours:3**

This course explores the developing relationship between religion and American constitutional law, focusing on historic documents and Supreme Court decisions relating to the First Amendment. Crosslisted as POLS 247.

RELI 281. Religion and American Politics. 1 Credit.**Offered Either Fall or Spring; Lecture hours:3**

This course explores the historical relationship of religion and American politics, focusing on the impact of religion in both domestic and foreign policy.

RELI 301. Ethics in/and the Anthropocene. 1 Credit.**Offered Either Fall or Spring; Lecture hours:3**

The cumulative force of human impacts on the planet has led scientists to name our era the Anthropocene or Age of Humans. This course will explore the profound dilemmas of living in a time of increased responsibility and extreme uncertainty. How should we think about ethics in this new context?.

RELI 302. Humanism, Naturalism, Atheism. 1 Credit.**Offered Either Fall or Spring; Lecture hours:3**

Examination of the various factors that have resulted in a loss of traditional faith and exploration of new religious perspectives grounded in humanism, naturalism, and atheism. Topics include emerging views of humanity; the interplay of artistic creativity and religion; the role of science; ecology and religion; and atheistic, ethical perspectives.

RELI 305. The Male Body in Judaism. 1 Credit.**Offered Occasionally; Lecture hours:3**

Investigates the male body from Jewish and comparative perspectives: the body of athletes; Jewish/Black relations; theories of masculinity; the body of soldiers; stereotyping; human and divine bodies. Prerequisites: sophomore, junior, or senior status and permission of the instructor.

RELI 306. Messianism and Madness. 1 Credit.**Offered Occasionally; Lecture hours:3**

Judaism and Jewish sectarianism include numerous Messianic figures: from Jesus to Messiah Ephraim; Shabbetai Zvi; Zionism; kabbalistic, midrashic, philosophical, Hassidic, and contemporary ideas of redemption. Prerequisite: sophomore, junior, or seniors only. Others by permission of instructor.

RELI 310. Topics in Religion and Law. 1 Credit.**Offered Occasionally; Lecture hours:3; Repeatable**

This course will examine aspects of the relationship between religion and law in global, regional, tradition-based, and/or historical contexts. Prerequisite: sophomore, junior or senior status only. Open to others by permission of the instructor.

RELI 312. Digesting Divinity: Religion, Food and Diet. 1 Credit.**Offered Either Fall or Spring; Lecture hours:3**

This course considers the relationship between food, consumption, and the construction of religious identity. Students will read a wide range of sources from antiquity to the present, exploring the ways in which food customs structure human belief and function as a point of communication between humanity and divinity.

RELI 315. Topics in American Religion. 1 Credit.**Offered Occasionally; Lecture hours:3; Repeatable**

This course will examine specific topics in American religion including in-depth analyses of religious movements and traditions in America. Prerequisite: sophomore, junior or senior status only. Open to others by permission of the instructor.

RELI 316. Topics in Religion and Culture. 1 Credit.**Offered Occasionally; Lecture hours:3; Repeatable**

This course will examine the interrelation between religion and cultural phenomena in diverse contexts of human experience. Prerequisite: sophomore, junior or senior status only. Open to others by permission of the instructor.

RELI 317. Cultivating the Self. 1 Credit.**Offered Occasionally; Lecture hours:3**

Study of self-cultivation as a central theme in religious and philosophical reflection. Students will explore different meanings of self-cultivation as a practice of training the self's energies to attain an ideal of human excellence in multiple traditions. Prerequisite: sophomore, junior or senior only. Open to others by permission of instructor.

RELI 318. Jewish Thought. 1 Credit.**Offered Occasionally; Lecture hours:3**

Text-based class: cultural influences upon Jewish thought and practice in major Jewish books, traditional and contemporary Judaism, from Philo to Derrida: Human existence and identity. Prerequisite: sophomore, junior, or senior only. Open to others by permission of instructor.

RELI 320. Individual Studies In Religion. .5-1 Credits.**Offered Both Fall and Spring; Lecture hours:Varies,Other:Varies; Repeatable**

Guided investigations. Open to qualified students with some previous study of religion who wish to pursue individual programs of study in the field. Prerequisite: Only by permission of the instructor.

RELI 325. Major Religious Thinkers. 1 Credit.**Offered Occasionally; Lecture hours:3; Repeatable**

The thought, historical setting, and influence of one or more classical religious thinkers, e.g., Paul the Apostle, Augustine, Kierkegaard, Confucius, Rosenzweig, Gandhi. Prerequisite: sophomore, junior, or senior only. Open to others by permission of the instructor.

RELI 350. Honors Thesis. 1 Credit.**Offered Both Fall and Spring; Lecture hours:3; Repeatable**

Honors thesis. Prerequisite: permission of the instructor.

RELI 400. Senior Seminar - Culminating Experience. 1 Credit.**Offered Spring Semester Only; Lecture hours:3**

The Senior Seminar is required for all majors in Religious Studies, and is designed to give majors an opportunity to integrate the knowledge and skills they have acquired, and to hone their research, writing, and oral skills. Prerequisites: Open to seniors in Religious Studies and others by permission of instructor.