An interdepartmental program

Religious Studies

Objectives

The modern field of religious studies contributes significantly to a liberal arts education, cultivating the investigation of religious thought, ritual, spiritual insight, culture, history, and sacred texts. The goal of the Program in Religious Studies is to expose students to several scholarly and pedagogical approaches to a variety of religious phenomena, often in a comparative context. The program’s course offerings are designed to encourage students to deepen their understanding of religion and its manifestations through the perspectives of several disciplines and departments. Students survey systematic approaches to the field (REL 107a) and complete courses in at least two different religious traditions.

The program fosters interaction between its faculty and students by requiring completion of either an independent study or a senior essay course. The University, with its commitment to ethical responsibility, and the wide range of religious and ethnic backgrounds represented in its student body, provides a unique context for examining religion with open-minded curiosity and sympathetic understanding.

How to Become a Minor

Students may enter the program at any time in their undergraduate careers, but an early start maximizes a student’s range of choice because a number of the courses are only offered every other year. Ideally students should take the core course (REL 107a) early in their career. Students should consult with their advisor and the head of the program to map out their particular design.

Committee

| Patricia Johnston, Chair                  | Edward Kaplan, Chair                  |
| [Classical Studies]                      | [Romance and Comparative Literature]  |
| Edward Kaplan                           | Charles McClendon                     |
| [Romance and Comparative Literature]     | [Fine Arts]                           |
| Tzvi Abusch                             | Jerry Samet                            |
| [Near Eastern and Judaic Studies]        | [Philosophy]                          |
| Bernadette Brooten                      | Ellen Schatt Schneider                 |
| [Near Eastern and Judaic Studies]        | [Anthropology]                         |
| John Burt                               |                                        |
| [English and American Literature]        |                                        |
| Arthur Green                            |                                        |
| [Near Eastern and Judaic Studies]        |                                        |
| Gila Hayim                              |                                        |
| [Sociology]                             |                                        |

The following faculty members are affiliated with the program:

- Marc Brettler (NEJS)
- Joan Bryant (AAAS)
- Olga Davidson (WMNS)
- Jonathan Decter (NEJS)
- Stephen Dowden (GREA)
- Sylvia Fishman (NEJS)
- ChaeRan Freeze (NEJS)
- Gregory Freeze (HIST)
- Eli Hirsch (PHIL)
- Patricia Johnston (CLAS)
- Jane Kamensky (HIST)
- William Kapelle (HIST)
- Reuven Kimelman (NEJS)
- Ann Koloski-Ostrow (CLAS)
- Sarah Lamb (ANTH)
- Richard Lansing (ROCL)
- Avigdor Levy (NEJS)
- Leonard Mueullner (CLAS)
- Yitzhak Nakash (NEJS)
- Richard Parmentier (ANTH)
- Michael Randall (ROCL)
- Jonathan Sarna (NEJS)
- John Schrecker (HIST)
- Eugene Sheppard (NEJS)
- Govind Sreenivasan (HIST)
- Ramie Targoff (ENG)
- Cheryl Walker (CLAS)
- David Wright (NEJS)
- Palle Yourgrau (PHIL)
Requirements for the Minor

A. Core Course: REL 107a [Approaches to Religious Studies]. Ideally the core course should be taken early in the student’s career at Brandeis, but not necessarily as the first course in the program.

B. Students must complete at least two courses covering at least two different religious traditions from the traditions courses listed below.

C. Students must complete at least one course from the list of electives listed below.

Courses of Instruction

[1-99] Primarily for Undergraduate Students

REL 97a Senior Essay
Signature of the instructor required. Usually offered every year.
Staff

REL 97b Senior Essay
Signature of the instructor required. Usually offered every year.
Staff

REL 98a Independent Study
Signature of the instructor required. Usually offered every year.
Staff

REL 98b Independent Study
Signature of the instructor required. Usually offered every year.
Staff

REL 107a Approaches to Religious Studies
[ nw hum ]
Prerequisite: One previous course in religious studies. Enrollment limited to 30.
A historical, multidisciplinary survey that includes classic explanations of religion as a human experience, modern theories, the study of belief systems, religions and society, myth and philosophy, mysticism and shamanism, texts, ritual and language, comparative study, gender issues, and contemporary debates. Usually offered every year. Will be offered in the spring of 2004.
Staff

REL 121a Mysticism and the Moral Life: Abraham Heschel, Howard Thurman,
Thomas Merton
(formerly HIP 21a)
[ hum ]
This course may not be repeated for credit by students who have taken HIP 21a in previous years. Enrollment limited to 25.
A study of three exemplary American religious activists: Abraham Heschel, a Jewish theologian and activist; Thomas Merton, a Trappist monk; and Howard Thurman, a black minister. Focuses upon the relationship between their inwardness and social and political commitments. Usually offered every third year. Last offered in the spring of 2000.
Mr. Kaplan

REL 131b The Dynamics of Religious Experience
[ hum ]
Enrollment limited to 25.
A comparative study of religious experience, including Christian, Jewish, non-biblical, and feminist responses to modern anguish and the quest for identity and absolute meaning. Topics include doubt, sin, conversion, prayer, mysticism, holiness, and social action. Usually offered every third year. Last offered in the spring of 2002.
Mr. Kaplan

Traditions Courses

The following courses are approved for the program. Not all are given in any one year. Please consult the Course Schedule each semester.

ANTH 80a
World Religions

CLAS 170a
Classical Mythology

HIST 181a
Seminar in Traditional Chinese Thought

IMES 104a
Islam: Civilization and Institutions

NEJS 5a
(formerly NEJS 1a)
Foundational Course in Judaic Studies

NEJS 9a
(formerly NEJS 1b)
The World of the Ancient Near East

NEJS 111a
The Hebrew Bible

NEJS 114b
Biblical Ritual, Cult, and Magic

NEJS 116a
(formerly NEJS 156b)
Ancient Near Eastern Religion and Mythology

NEJS 128a
(formerly NEJS 132a)
Introduction to Christianity

NEJS 130a

NEJS 153a
Hasidism as a Religious and Social Movement

NEJS 155b
Judaism and the Religious Quest

NEJS 186a
(formerly NEJS 110a)
Introduction to the Qur’an

NEJS 187b
(formerly NEJS 143b)
Shi’ism and Political Protest in the Middle East
The following courses approved for the program are not all given in any one year, and therefore, the Course Schedule for each semester should be consulted.

**AAAS 81b**
Religion in African-American History

**AMST 167b**
The Cultural Work of Religion in America

**ANTH 105a**
Symbol, Myth, and Ritual

**ANTH 143b**
Recovering Religion in the Archaeological Record

**ANTH 154b**
Selected Topics in Comparative Religion: Seminal Works in the Study of Religion

**ANTH 199b**
Problems and Possibilities in the Study of Religion

**COML 179a**
Life Stories, Spiritual and Profane

**COML 194b**
Topics in Myth, Literature, and Folklore

**FA 13b**
Buddhist Art

**FA 42b**
The Age of Cathedrals

**FA 45a**
St. Peter’s and the Vatican

**GECS 182b**
Nietzsche

**HIST 110b**
The Civilization of the High and Late Middle Ages

**HIST 123b**
Reformation Europe (1400-1600)

**HIST 129b**
Science and Religion: The Trial of Galileo

**HIST 135b**
Evolution and Creationism in Historical Perspective

**HIST 148a**
Religion and Society in Modern Russia

**HIST 152b**
Salem, 1692

**HUM 10a**
The Western Canon

**IECS 140a**
Dante’s *Divine Comedy*

**NEJS 29a**
Feminist Sexual Ethics in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam

**NEJS 112a**
The Book of Genesis

**NEJS 115a**
The Book of Deuteronomy

**NEJS 115b**
Women and the Bible

**NEJS 122a**
Dealing with Evil in Ancient Babylon and Beyond: Magic and Witchcraft in Antiquity

**NEJS 127b**
The Jewish Liturgy

**NEJS 139a**
Varieties of Medieval Judaism

**NEJS 156a**
Introduction to Jewish Mysticism

**NEJS 157b**
Medieval Jewish Philosophy

**NEJS 158b**
Topics in Jewish Devotional Literature in the Medieval and Later Periods

**NEJS 159a**
The Philosophy of Jewish Law

**NEJS 160a**
Contemporary Jewish Religious Thought

**NEJS 162a**
American Judaism

**NEJS 163a**
Jewish-Christian Relations in America

**NEJS 170a**
[formerly NEJS 125a]
Studying Sacred Texts

**NEJS 175b**
[formerly NEJS 169b]
Responses to the Holocaust in Literature

**NEJS 186b**
[formerly NEJS 129a]
Biblical Narratives in the Qur’an

**NEJS 164a**
Judaism Confronts America

**NEJS 196a**
Marriage, Divorce, and Sexual Ethics in Islamic Law

**MUS 186a**
African American Sacred Music Cosmos

**PHIL 24a**
Philosophy of Religion

**PHIL 146a**
Idea of God

**PHIL 172b**
Spinoza

**PHIL 178b**
Major Figures in the Christian Faith: Simone Weil

**REL 121a**
Mysticism and the Moral Life: Abraham Heschel, Howard Thurman, Thomas Merton

**REL 131b**
The Dynamics of Religious Experience

**SOC 128a**
Topics in the Sociology of Religion

**TUTR 20b**
Ancient Mystery Cults

**WMNS 195b**
The Woman’s Voice in the Muslim World
Faculty

Erica Harth, Chair

Isabel Seliger, Mellon Postdoctoral Fellow

Harleen Singh, Mellon Postdoctoral Fellow
Postcolonial and Gender Studies.

French and Comparative Literature

Jane Hale, French and Francophone Program Undergraduate Advising Head

Edward Kaplan

Michael Randall
Late Medieval and Renaissance poetry, prose, and philosophy.

Italian and Comparative Literature

Richard Lansing, Italian Program Undergraduate Advising Head

Spanish and Comparative Literature

Roxanne Dávila
Modern and contemporary Latin American literature and culture. Latin American studies.

Dian Fox, Undergraduate Advising Head for Spanish Majors

James Mandrell
Modern and contemporary Spanish literature. Genre and gender. Film.

Angela María Pérez, Undergraduate Advising Head for Spanish Minors

French

Hollie Harder, Director of Language Programs
French language.

Raphael Künstler
French language.

Sabine Levet
French language.

Esther Ratner
French and Spanish language.

Italian

Paola Servino
Italian language.

Spanish

Jorge Arteta
Spanish language.

Mary Burstin
Spanish language.

Olmanda Hernández
Spanish language.

Raysa Mederos
Spanish language.

Dora Older
Spanish language.

Esther Ratner
Spanish language.

Nidia Schuhmacher
Spanish language.

Requirements

For course offerings and requirements for the major, see
Comparative Literature, European Cultural Studies, French, Italian, and Spanish.