

An interdepartmental program

Courses of Study:  
Minor

# 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**  
(Classical Studies)

**Edward Kaplan, Chair**  
(Romance and Comparative Literature)

**Tzvi Abusch**  
(Near Eastern and Judaic Studies)

**Bernadette Brooten**  
(Near Eastern and Judaic Studies)

**John Burt**  
(English and American Literature)

**Arthur Green**  
(Near Eastern and Judaic Studies)

**Gila Hayim**  
(Sociology)

**Edward Kaplan**  
(Romance and Comparative Literature)

**Charles McClendon**  
(Fine Arts)

**Jerry Samet**  
(Philosophy)

**Ellen Schattschneider**  
(Anthropology)

The following faculty members are affiliated with the program:

Marc Brettler (NEJS)  
Joan Bryant (AAAS)  
Olga Davidson (WMNS)  
Jonathan Decter (NEJS)  
Stephen Dowden (GREAS)  
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 Muellner (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.**

**D. Completion of one semester of independent study (98a or b), or completion of a senior essay (97a or b) under the direction of one or more faculty members affiliated with the program. A senior thesis in the student's major, with an emphasis on some aspect of religious studies and read by at least two faculty members in the program, may be substituted for the Senior Essay. Students will normally complete this requirement in the year in which they complete the program, although exceptions may be granted by the program chair in consultation with the student's program advisor.**

**E. A passing letter grade must be obtained in each course taken for program credit. (Pass/Fail courses are not allowed.) Students must achieve a grade point average of at least 2.00 in program courses.**

## 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

The New Testament: A Historical Introduction

#### 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

**Elective Courses**

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**

(formerly NEJS 142b)

Dealing with Evil in Ancient Babylon and Beyond: Magic and Witchcraft in Antiquity

**NEJS 127b**

The Jewish Liturgy

**NEJS 139a**

(formerly NEJS 124a)

Varieties of Medieval Judaism

**NEJS 156a**

(formerly NEJS 124b)

Introduction to Jewish Mysticism

**NEJS 157b**

(formerly NEJS 123a)

Medieval Jewish Philosophy

**NEJS 158b**

Topics in Jewish Devotional Literature in the Medieval and Later Periods

**NEJS 159a**

(formerly NEJS 105b)

The Philosophy of Jewish Law

**NEJS 160a**

(formerly NEJS 119b)

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**

(formerly NEJS 195b)

The Woman's Voice in the Muslim World

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Department of  
**Romance and Comparative Literature**

Courses of Study:  
 See French Language and Literature.  
 See Italian Studies.  
 See Spanish Language and Literature.

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**Faculty**
**Erica Harth, Chair**

Seventeenth- and 18th-century French prose. Cultural studies and comparative literature. Feminism and gender studies.

**Isabel Seliger, Mellon Postdoctoral Fellow**

East Asian Literature. Japanese women writers: poetry, fiction and criticism.

**Harleen Singh, Mellon Postdoctoral Fellow**

Postcolonial and Gender Studies.

**French and Comparative Literature**
**Jane Hale, French and Francophone Program Undergraduate Advising Head**

French and comparative literature. Twentieth-century French fiction and drama. Beckett, Queneau. Literature and painting. Francophone literature of Africa and the Caribbean.

**Edward Kaplan**

French romanticism. Michelet. Hugo. Modern French poetry and theory. Baudelaire. Jabès. Bonnefoy. Religion and literature. Translation.

**Michael Randall**

Late Medieval and Renaissance poetry, prose, and philosophy.

**Italian and Comparative Literature**
**Richard Lansing, Italian Program Undergraduate Advising Head**

Dante. Italian and European Renaissance. Courtly tradition. Modern Italian literature.

**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**

Spanish medieval. Spanish golden age (16th- and 17th-century) drama, prose, poetry. Cervantes.

**James Mandrell**

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

**Angela María Pérez, Undergraduate Advising Head for Spanish Minors**

Colonial Latin American literature. Latin American film and cultural studies. Latin American women writers.

**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.

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**Requirements**

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