

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 offered every other year. Ideally, students should take the core course (REL 107a) early in their career. Students should consult with their adviser and the head of the program to map out their particular design.

## Committee

**Patricia Johnston, Chair**  
(Classical Studies)

**Tzvi Abusch (on leave 2008–2009)**  
(Near Eastern and Judaic Studies)

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

**Wendy Cadge (on leave 2008–2009)**  
(Sociology)

**Jonathan Decter**  
(Near Eastern and Judaic Studies)

**Gila Hayim**  
(Sociology)

**Edward Kaplan**  
(Romance Studies)

**Charles McClendon**  
(Fine Arts)

**Jerry Samet**  
(Philosophy)

**Ellen Schattschneider**  
(Anthropology)

The following faculty members are affiliated with the program:

Marc Brettler (NEJS)  
John Burt (ENG)  
Stephen Dowden (GRALL)  
Sylvia Fishman (NEJS)  
ChaeRan Freeze (NEJS)  
Gregory Freeze (HIST)  
Eli Hirsch (PHIL)  
Jane Kamensky (HIST)  
William Kapelle (HIST)  
Reuven Kimelman (NEJS)  
Ann Koloski-Ostrow (CLAS)  
Sarah Lamb (ANTH)  
Richard Lansing (ROMS)  
Avigdor Levy (NEJS)  
Leonard Muellner (CLAS)  
Richard Parmentier (ANTH)  
Michael Randall (ROMS)  
Jonathan Sarna (NEJS)  
Eugene Sheppard (NEJS)  
Govind Sreenivasan (HIST)  
Cheryl Walker (CLAS)  
David Wright (NEJS)  
Palle Yourgrau (PHIL)

## Requirements for the Minor

**A.** Core course: REL 107a (Introduction to World Religions). 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 two courses from the list of electives listed below.

**D.** A Senior Essay (REL 97a or b) may replace one of the two electives with the approval of the program chair.

**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 GPA of at least 2.0 in program courses.

## Courses of Instruction

### REL 97a Senior Essay

Usually offered every year.  
Staff

### REL 97b Senior Essay

Usually offered every year.  
Staff

### REL 98a Independent Study

Usually offered every year.  
Staff

### REL 98b Independent Study

Usually offered every year.  
Staff

### REL 107a Introduction to World Religions

[ hum nw ]

This course serves as an introduction to the study of religion; it surveys some of the major religions of the world.  
Staff

### REL 131b The Dynamics of Religious Experience

[ hum ]

A comparative study of religious experience, including Christian, Jewish, nonbiblical, 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.  
Mr. Kaplan

### REL 151a The Buddha: His Life and Teachings

[ hum nw ]

Few human beings have had as much impact on the world as Siddhartha Gotama Shakyamuni, known to us as Buddha. This course explores his life and teachings as reflected in early Buddhist literature and Western scholarship. Usually offered every year.  
Staff

## Traditions Courses

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

### ANTH 80a

Anthropology of Religion

### CLAS 170a

Classical Mythology

### HIST 181a

Seminar on Traditional Chinese Thought

### IMES 104a

Islam: Civilization and Institutions

### NEJS 3a

Introduction to Judaism, Christianity, and Islam

### NEJS 5a

Foundational Course in Judaic Studies

### NEJS 9a

The World of the Ancient Near East

### NEJS 111a

The Hebrew Bible/Old Testament

### NEJS 114b

Biblical Ritual, Cult, and Magic

### NEJS 116a

Ancient Near Eastern Religion and Mythology

### NEJS 128a

Introduction to Christianity

### NEJS 130a

The New Testament: A Historical Introduction

### NEJS 153a

Hasidism as a Religious and Social Movement

### NEJS 186a

Introduction to the Qur'an

### NEJS 187b

Shi'ism and Political Protest in the Middle East

## NEJS 198b

Modern Islamic Thought: The Eighteenth Century through the Contemporary Era

## REL 151a

The Buddha: His Life and Teachings

## Elective Courses

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

### AAAS 81b

Religion in African-American History

### AMST 167b

The Cultural Work of Religion in America

### AMST 168b

American Religious History

### ANTH 105a

Myth and Ritual

### ANTH 137b

Gender and the Sacred in Asia

### COML 179a

Life Stories, Spiritual and Profane

### FA 13b

Buddhist Art

### FA 15b

Arts of the Ming Dynasty

### FA 42b

The Age of Cathedrals

### FA 45a

St. Peter's and the Vatican

### FECS 147a

Jewish Identities in France since 1945

### HIST 110b

The Civilization of the High and Late Middle Ages

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- HIST 123b**  
Reformation Europe (1400–1600)
- HIST 126a**  
Early Modern Europe (1500–1700)
- HIST 148a**  
Religion and Society in Modern Russia
- HIST 152b**  
Salem, 1692
- HUM 10a**  
The Western Canon
- IECS 140a**  
Dante's *Divine Comedy*
- NEJS 112a**  
The Book of Genesis
- NEJS 115a**  
The Book of Deuteronomy
- NEJS 115b**  
Women and the Bible
- NEJS 122a**  
Magic and Witchcraft in the Ancient Near East
- NEJS 127b**  
The Jewish Liturgy
- NEJS 153b**  
Abraham Joshua Heschel: Spirituality and Action
- NEJS 159a**  
Major Trends in Modern Jewish Philosophy
- NEJS 162a**  
American Judaism
- NEJS 163a**  
Jewish-Christian Relations in America
- NEJS 164a**  
Judaism Confronts America
- NEJS 166b**  
"Divided Souls": Jewish Conversion and Identity in Historical Perspective
- NEJS 175b**  
Responses to the Holocaust in Literature
- NEJS 190b**  
Islamic Philosophy
- NEJS 191b**  
Messianism and the State of Israel
- NEJS 194b**  
Sufi Teachings
- NEJS 196a**  
Marriage, Divorce, and Sexual Ethics in Islamic Law
- PHIL 24a**  
Philosophy of Religion
- PHIL 146a**  
Idea of God
- PHIL 178b**  
Major Figures in the Christian Faith
- POL 145b**  
The Islamic Challenge: Politics and Religion in the West
- REL 131b**  
The Dynamics of Religious Experience
- SOC 128a**  
Religion and Globalization
- SOC 129a**  
Sociology of Religion