

**The College of Charleston**

**Religious Studies Department Fall 2009 Course Brochure**

All religious studies courses satisfy the Humanities requirement. There are both a major and a minor in religious studies for those with a serious interest in the study of religion.

**REQUIREMENTS FOR THE MAJOR IN RELIGIOUS STUDIES:** 33 semester hours, that must include:

- 1) RELS 101 or 105
- 2) RELS 210 Theories in the Study of Religions
- 3) One of: RELS 225, 230, or 235
- 4) One of: RELS 240, 245, or 248
- 5) One of: RELS 250, 260, 270
- 6) One of: RELS 201, 202, or 205
- 7) RELS 450: Senior Seminar in Religious Studies
- 8) One additional course at the 200-level or above
- 9) Two additional courses at the 300-level or above
- 10) Additional elective: 1 course from RELS 105-499

With the approval of the Chair of Religious Studies, one course (200 level or above) in a related discipline may be substituted for one of the courses listed under 8 or 9 above.

**REQUIREMENTS FOR THE MINOR IN RELIGIOUS STUDIES:** 18 semester hours (at least three hours of which must be at or above the 300 level), which must include:

- 1) RELS 101 or 105
- 2) One of: RELS 225, 230, 235, 240, 245, 248
- 3) One of: RELS 201, 202, or 205
- 4) One course from RELS 300-499
- 5) Additional Electives: 2 courses from RELS 105-499. With the approval of the Chair of Religious Studies, one course (200 level or above) in a related discipline may be substituted for number 4 above.

**Religious Studies Course Offerings**

HONS 175.001	Approaches to Religion	Bjerken	TR	10:50-12:05	MYBK 320
RELS 101.001	Approaches to Religion	Bjerken	MWF	11:00-11:50	ECTR 219
RELS 101.002	Approaches to Religion	Thomas	TR	08:00-09:15	ECTR 219
RELS 101.003	Approaches to Religion	Thomas	TR	10:50-12:05	ECTR 219
RELS 105.001	Intro to World Religions	Cormack	MWF	09:00-09:50	ECTR 103
RELS 105.002	Intro to World Religions	Cormack	MWF	10:00-10:50	ECTR 103
RELS 105.003	Intro to World Religions	Doire	TR	08:00-09:15	ECTR 103
RELS 105.004	Intro to World Religions	Doire	TR	09:25-10:40	ECTR 103
RELS 105.005	Intro to World Religions	McDaniel	TR	01:40-02:55	ECTR 103
RELS 105.006	Intro to World Religions	Siegler	MWF	02:00-02:50	ECTR 103
RELS 120.001	Religion, Art and Culture	Siegler	MWF	11:00-11:50	ECTR 103
RELS 120.002	Religion, Art and Culture	Siegler	MWF	12:00-12:50	ECTR 103
RELS 201.001	Heb Bible: History and Interpretation	Huddlestun	MWF	09:00-09:50	ECTR 219
RELS 201.002	Heb Bible: History and Interpretation	Huddlestun	MWF	10:00-10:50	ECTR 219
RELS 210.001	Theories in Study of Religions	Huddlestun	MWF	01:00-01:50	ECTR 103
RELS 220.001	Comparative Religious Ethics	Doire	MW	02:00-03:15	ECTR 219
RELS 220.090	Comparative Religious Ethics	Doire	MW	04:00-05:15	ECTR 219
RELS 245.001	The Religions of India	McDaniel	TR	10:50-12:05	ECTR 103
RELS 260.001	Native American Religious Traditions	Irwin	TR	09:25-10:40	ECTR 219
RELS 275.001	Religious Tradition and Scientific Inquiry	Thomas	TR	01:40-02:55	ECTR 219
RELS 298.001	History of Religion in Scandinavia	Cormack	MWF	12:00-12:50	ECTR 219
RELS 310.001	Sacred Texts of Asia	Bjerken	MW	03:20-04:35	ECTR 103
RELS 405.001	Seminar: Islamic Mysticism	Irwin	TR	12:15-01:30	ECTR 219

**RELS 101: Approaches to Religion: “In Search of the Sacred, the Strange, and the Substance of Faith”**

Prof. Bjerken

Section 001 (MWF 11:00-11:50)

NO PREREQUISITES

This course introduces students to Christianity and other religions in America, to Indian Hinduism and to Tibetan Buddhism by focusing on their distinctive understandings of sacred place and pilgrimage. We begin by reading the studies of two “Road Scholars,” who seek to understand American religions while they undertake a common American ritual: the road trip. After visiting many odd and fascinating roadside religious attractions in the US, we travel to the ancient and living city of Banaras in India. This sacred city will serve as a lens through which the worldview of Hindu pilgrims comes into focus. Finally we journey to Mt. Kailash in the Himalayas, regarded by Tibetan Buddhists as the central axis of the universe and a very powerful pilgrimage site. The goal of the course is to see these strange and wondrous places as an expression of the religious imagination, where believers have sought to give outward form to their religious experiences. We will rely on texts that combine travel narrative and religious study, as well as documentary films and slides to gain insight into the religious art, rituals, and sacred stories of the pilgrims.

**RELS 101: Approaches to Religion**

Prof. Thomas

Section 001 (TR 08:00-09:15)

Section 002 (TR 10:50-12:05)

NO PREREQUISITES

In this course, we will look at several accounts of religious experience, from the mundane to the mystical, from the awesome to the sublime: Judaism and the Holocaust, Fundamentalist snake-handlers, the scientific as a spiritual experience, and Buddhism in America. In order to help organize our readings, we will interweave among our readings four theories that represent four different ways of understanding religious experience.

**RELS 105: Introduction to World Religions**

Prof. Cormack

Section 001 (MWF 09:00-09:50)

Section 002 (MWF 10:00-10:50)

NO PREREQUISITES

The goal of this course is to introduce you to the beliefs, practices, and history of the major religions of the world. We will approach each tradition impartially, studying its beliefs concerning divinity/ies, the universe, the place and obligations of human beings within that universe, the afterlife, and how these beliefs were represented in cultural artifacts – poetry, statues, temples, sacred texts. We will consider how the beliefs developed and how they relate to the societies that adhere to them. You will learn about how people from many different cultures look at the world, and how to think both critically and sympathetically about a variety of world-views.

**RELS 105: Introduction to World Religions**

Prof. Doire

Section 003 (TR 08:00-09:15)

Section 004 (TR 09:25-10:40)

NO PREREQUISITES

This course is designed to be an introduction to the academic study of religion and of the world's major religious traditions including Hinduism, Buddhism, Daoism, Judaism, Christianity and Islam. Our study will include each tradition's historical development, sacred text, ritual, concept of the divine and soteriology. The methodology will include analysis through historical, literary, comparative and feminist criticisms. Primary and secondary texts will be implemented.

**RELS 105: Introduction to World Religions**

Prof. McDaniel

Section 005 (TR 01:40-02:55)

NO PREREQUISITES

This course will introduce the beliefs and practices of a wide variety of world religion, including indigenous religions and shamanism, Hinduism, Jainism, Sikhism, Buddhism, Confucianism, Taoism, Shinto, Judaism, Zoroastrianism, Christianity, Islam, and Gullah religion. There are no prerequisites, and the class will require four tests, one paper, and attendance.

**RELS 105: Introduction to World Religions**

Prof. Siegler

Section 006 (MWF 02:00-02:50)

NO PREREQUISITES

This course introduces the beliefs and practices of important religious traditions, emphasizing how religions change and interact with each other in the modern world. Approximately one week each will be spent on the following topics: Theories of Religion, Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Religions of India, Buddhism, Religions of China and Japan, Religions in America, Native American Religions, African-American Religions, and New Religious Movements.

**RELS 120: Religion, Art and Culture**

Prof. Siegler

Section 001 (MWF 11:00-11:50)

Section 002 (MWF 12:00-12:50)

NO PREREQUISITES

This course examines religion through the lens of popular culture, and popular culture through the lens of religion. Focusing mainly on examples from contemporary North America, including but not limited to novels, music, TV drama, talk shows, and sports, this course will help students become critical consumers of popular culture. Students will analyze, appreciate, and articulate deeper meanings in mass forms of entertainment. Students will also understand how religion in our society manifests itself beyond its traditional sectarian venues.

**RELS 201: Hebrew Bible: History and Interpretation**

Prof. Huddlestun

Section 001 (MWF 09:00-09:50)

Section 002 (MWF 10:00-10:50)

NO PREREQUISITES

In this course, the student is introduced to the academic study of the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament, examining issues of its composition, historical development, and interpretation (ancient and modern). Particular genres or types of biblical literature are considered against their wider ancient Near Eastern context (creation and cosmos, legal material, wisdom traditions, etc.). In reading and analyzing selected portions of the Hebrew scriptures, students will be exposed to various historical-critical, literary, and archaeological interpretations of the text. Topics covered include the covenant theme in Genesis and beyond, kingship in ancient Israel, the exodus event (history and archaeology), the role of prophets and the nature of ancient Israelite prophecy, the Davidic messiah-king and messianic expectation, biblical wisdom literature, and love poetry.

**RELS 210: Theories in the Study of Religions**

Section 090 (MWF 01:00-01:50)

Prof. Huddlestun

NO PREREQUISITES

As a theoretical introduction to the academic study of religion, this course surveys a number of important debates in the history of religious studies, such as the insider/outsider problem definitions of religion, theories on the origins of religion the comparison of religions, and religion's psychological, sociological, and political functions.

**RELS 220: Comparative Religious Ethics**

Prof. Doire

Section 001 (TR 02:00-03:15)

Section 090 (TR 04:00-05:15)

NO PREREQUISITES

Comparative Religious Ethics explores the nature of various religious ethical perspectives including the manner in which a particular religious ethic is grounded in text, culture and tradition. This course will utilize a narrative approach, employing both ancient and contemporary myths and stories as the point of departure for its study of the ethical traditions of Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism and Buddhism. We will also consider feminist and womanist ethical critique. Much has been made recently of the notion of "moral values," a phrase that many seem to take for granted. What is assumed in its utterance appears often to be the existence of some kind of universal (or at the very least, universal *American*) agreement on what these "values" are or, that there is a meaning inherent within the term itself. What are "*Christian* values" and in fact, how do they resemble or differ from the ethical foundations of other religious traditions? What are the ethical obligations of Muslims and what constitutes the foundation of these? What are the stories of Hinduism's "heroes" that exemplify living a noble and virtuous life? Are the virtues that define the "good man" and the "good woman" constructed differently? This course will provide the student with the opportunity to explore these and many other questions and issues raised within a comparative study of religious ethics.

**RELS 245: The Religions of India**

Prof. McDaniel

Section 001 (TR 10:50-12:05)

NO PREREQUISITES

This course will explore Hinduism, the major religion of India, but will also include Buddhism, Jainism, Sikhism, and Islam. We shall study Veda, Vedanta, the Yogas, Devotional Hinduism (gods and goddesses), Tantra, folk shamanism, and some major ritual practices associated with them. The class will have 3 tests, 2 papers, films and guest speakers. We shall look at Indian art, literature, folklore, music and dance.

**RELS 260: Native American Religious Traditions**

Prof. Irwin

Section 001 (TR 09:25-10:40)

NO PREREQUISITES

This course is designed to introduce students to Native American religions of North America and to discuss the consequences of invasion and the oppression of the native way of life. We will survey five representative native traditions: the Maya, the Southeast Ceremonial Complex, the Ani Yun'wiya (Cherokee), the Diné (Navajo), and the Hopi. We will study these traditions in terms of the general history of discovery, trade, settlement, warfare, government control, land loss, and reservation life in the present. In each religious tradition, we will discuss cosmology, rituals, belief in spirits, life after death, sacred stories, symbols, the importance of place and naming, and the ethnohistory of each community. We will also discuss the pan-national traditions of peyote, ghost dance, and spiritual ecology, and review some of the primary laws passed in the 20th century with regard to Native American religious practices.

**RELS 275: Religious Traditions and Scientific Inquiries**

Prof. Thomas

Section 001 (TR 01:40-02:55)

NO PREREQUISITES

This course will look at the interaction between religious tradition and scientific inquiry. Topics will include the evolution and creationism debates, spirituality and quantum physics, medicine and healing, and psychology and the mind-body relationship, involving the religious traditions from both West and East. Ian Barbour's theoretical framework will help guide the discussion.

**RELS 298: History of Religion in Scandinavia: "Pagans, Priests and Poets"**

Prof. Cormack

Section 001 (MWF 12:00-12:50)

NO PREREQUISITES

This course takes a chronological perspective on religion in Scandinavia covering 1500 years and two conversion periods: from pre-Christian religions to Christianity, from pre-Reformation Christianity to Lutheranism. It will be based on careful reading of primary sources, including sagas, poetry, folklore, and archaeological excavations. Evaluation of these sources as evidence for religious belief and practice will be an important part of the course. We will look backward (and forward) from medieval Christian accounts of the pagan past to variants of medieval tales in recent folklore. 'Religion' will be interpreted widely to incorporate all sorts of beliefs and practices pertaining to the supernatural (gods, elves, witches, magic, ghosts, religious institutions, etc.).

**RELS 310: Sacred Texts of Asia**

Prof. Bjerken

Section 001 (MW 03:20-04:35)

PREREQUISITE: *Either three semester hours in religious studies or permission of the instructor.*

This course will focus on four Asian religious classics in depth: *The Bhagavad Gita*, *The Kamasutra*, *The Lotus Sutra*, and *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*. The course will explore the problems involved in the writing, transmission, and study of these classic sacred texts in Asia, and in their reception in the modern west. We will first place these texts in their original Hindu and Buddhist contexts and consider how they were used in medieval India, Japan, and Tibet, before we examine how new meanings and values were discovered when these texts were read and consumed in modern America. We will examine different theories of textual revelation, the relationship between genre, gender and social roles, and how texts “script” religious experience and inform cultural norms. We will investigate how scriptures become the object of veneration, what criteria are used to identify a text as “sacred,” and the ways in which text-making leads to the formation of canons. We will also watch films and documentaries that re-present and reinterpret these texts for a contemporary western audience. *The texts and images we will use in this class contain explicit representations of sex, death, and violence. If you are offended by sexually explicit or violent images, or if you feel that discussing such images could unduly exploit or demean you, then this may not be the class for you.*

**RELS 405: Seminar: Islamic Mysticism (and American Sufism)**

Prof. Irwin

Section 001 (TR 12:15 – 01:30)

PREREQUISITES: *RELS 210, plus six additional hours in RELS, Junior or Senior Standing.*

This course will begin with a very brief survey of basic beliefs in Islam and the Shari'a and then offers a select history of Sufism (Islamic mysticism) based in specific texts. First we will look at early Sufism and its Sunni expressions, then review Sufism among the Shi'ite Muslims of Iran and Iraq, followed by the development of Sufism in India. From India, we will trace the lineage of Sufism into the American context and its current development in the Sufi order International and other American branches. Specific Sufi texts will be those written by Sufi mystics such as Ibn Arabi, al-Suhrawardi, Ruzbihan Baqli, Rumi, and in more contemporary writing, Shaikh Ahmad Al-'Alawi and Pir Vilayat Khan. Students should be prepared to engage in careful reading of primary Sufi philosophical, mystical texts (in English).

**HONS 175: Approaches to Religion**

Prof. Bjerken

Section 001 (TR 10:50-12:05)

NO PREREQUISITES

This course is an introduction to the academic study of religion in general and a survey of different understandings of sacred place and pilgrimage found in America and India. The main theme of “searching for the sacred, the strange and the substance of faith” takes us away from mainstream organized religion to examine the religiosity of socially marginalized individuals, whose visionary experiences inspire the creation of religious art and monuments. We begin by reading the studies of three “Road Scholars” who seek to find and interpret unusual forms of American religiosity while they undertake a common ritual: the cross-country road trip. On their road trips they encounter religion on the margins of America, yet they reveal themes that are central to American religious life: creativity as religious devotion, pilgrimage and the desire to recreate sacred time and space, prophecy and apocalypticism, the tension between authenticity, kitsch, and spiritual materialism, and the relation between religious vision and social marginality. After visiting many odd roadside religious attractions in the US, we travel to the ancient city of Varanasi in India. This sacred city steeped in history and Indian mythology will serve as a lens through which the worldview of Hindu pilgrims comes into focus. We will learn to see these strange and wondrous places as an expression of the religious imagination, where believers have sought to give outward form to their experiences and recreate the “substance of faith.”