

Department of Religion

<http://www.swarthmore.edu/academics/religion.xml>

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The Department of Religion plays a central role in the Swarthmore academic program. One attraction of the study of religion is the cross-cultural nature of its subject matter. The discipline addresses the complex interplay of culture, history, text, orality, performance, and personal experience. Religion is expressed in numerous ways: ritual and symbol, myth and legend, story and poetry, scripture and theology, festival and ceremony, art and music, moral codes and social values. The department seeks to develop ways of understanding these phenomena in terms of their historical and cultural particularity and in reference to their common patterns.

Courses offered on a regular cycle in the department present the development of Judaism, Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, Afro-Caribbean religions, and Christianity as well as the development of religion and religions in the regional areas of the Indian Sub-Continent (Hindu, Jain, Buddhist, Muslim, Sikh), Sri Lanka and Southeast Asia (Buddhism, Hinduism, and Islam), China (Taoist, Confucian, spirit cults), Japan (Buddhist and Shinto), Africa (Fon, Yoruba, Dahomey, and Kongo), the Middle East (Christian, Islamic, Jewish, Gnostic, Mandaean), Jewish, Christian, and Islamic Europe and the Americas (from New World African traditions, Vodou and Candomblé, to Neo Paganism and Civil Religion in North America). Breadth in subject matter is complemented by strong methodological diversity; questions raised include those of historical, theological, philosophical, literary, feminist, sociological, and anthropological interests. This multifaceted focus makes religious studies ideal liberal arts major.

The Academic Program

Normally, the student who applies for a major or minor in religion will have completed (or be in the process of completing) two courses in the discipline. Majors successfully complete eight credits in religion, including the required Senior Symposium (Religion Café) in the fall of the senior year, to meet departmental and college graduation requirements. Minors complete five credits in the Religion Department and are not required to take the Senior Symposium. For many students, courses numbered Religion 001–013 serve as points of entry for advanced work in the department, and sometimes as prerequisites for higher-level courses, though this is not always the case.

Students come to the study of religion through various courses at various levels, and the department encourages this flexibility and diversity of entry-points by having no introductory course requirements, nor are there required distribution courses. The major in religion is planned in consultation with faculty members in the department, the individual student's adviser, along with other relevant faculty, who encourage curricular breadth (close work in more than one religious tradition) and methodological diversity in the proposed program. Such breadth and diversity in the program is encouraged at the very beginning in the major's Sophomore Paper statement.

The curriculum in the Religion Department is strongly comparative, thematic, and interdisciplinary, so it is relatively easy for students to propose programs that are cross-cultural and trans-disciplinary in scope. Religion majors are encouraged to include study abroad in their programs, planned in collaboration with the department. Often a student's independent study project done while studying abroad is expanded into a one or two-credit honors or course thesis upon return to Swarthmore.

Course Major and Minor

Requirements

General major requirements are 8 credits in religion, *including* the Senior Symposium. En route to completing (at least) eight religion credits, students who major in religion are free to take a variety of courses of their own choice, in consultation with the department and their departmental adviser, but are required to enroll in the Senior Symposium: Religion Café, in the fall of the student's senior year. Successful completion of the symposium will be the culminating requirement for the course major. For all religion majors the symposium will be a one-credit seminar and will include a term essay assignment.

Religion minors will complete (at least) five religion credits, and are not required to enroll in the Senior Symposium: Religion Café.

Students may choose to write a thesis. Those seniors who desire to complete a one-credit thesis or a two-credit thesis as part of the major will need to obtain permission from a faculty adviser in consultation with the department. For majors, this exercise will not substitute for the Senior Symposium.

With department approval, up to three courses cross-listed but not housed within the Religion Department may count toward the major. Only one such cross-listed course will count toward the minor. Up to two non-Swarthmore courses (i.e., courses taken abroad or domestically) may count toward the major; only one such course is permissible for the minor. The department will accept two courses in language (Arabic, Hebrew, or other proposed research languages) toward the major with the approval of department faculty. The department will accept one course in language (Arabic, Hebrew, or other proposed research languages) toward the minor with the approval of department faculty.

Admission to the Major

The Religion Department considers two areas when evaluating applications: overall GPA and quality of prior work in religion courses. Applicants are sometimes deferred for a term so the department can better evaluate an application for the major (generally it is expected that students will have taken two courses in religion before being accepted into the major/minor). A student's demonstrated ability to do at least B/B- work in religion is required for admission to the major in course.

Honors Major and Minor

Requirements

All honors majors and minors fulfill requirements for the Course Program. Beyond this step, the normal method of preparation for the honors major will be done through three seminars, although with the consent of the department, a single 2-credit thesis, a 1-credit thesis/course combination, or a combination of two courses (including attachments and study abroad options) can count for one honors preparation. In general, only one such preparation can consist of non-seminar-based studies.

In the religion major, the mode of assessing a student's three 2-credit preparations in religion (seminars or course combinations, but not 2-credit theses) will be a three-hour written examination set by an external examiner. In addition, with the exception of a thesis preparation, a student will submit to each external examiner a Senior Honors Study paper. Senior Honors Study papers will be between 2500 and 4000 words and will normally be a revision of the final seminar paper or, in the event of a non-seminar mode of preparation, a revised course paper. A final oral examination by the examiner follows the written exam. 2-credit theses will be read and orally examined by an external examiner (with no extra Senior Honors Study requirement).

In the minor, the mode of assessing a student's one 2-credit preparation in religion will also be a three-hour written examination (and the oral) set by an external examiner, along with a Senior Honors Study paper. Seminars and the written and oral external examinations are the hallmarks of honors. Seminars are a collaborative and cooperative venture among students and faculty members designed to promote self-directed learning. The teaching faculty evaluates seminar performance based on the quality of seminar papers, comments during seminar discussions, and

when required, a final paper. Since the seminar depends on the active participation of all its members, the department expects students to live up to the standards of honors. These standards include: attendance at every seminar session, timely submission of seminar papers, reading of seminar papers before the seminar, completion of the assigned readings prior to the seminar, active engagement in seminar discussions, and respect for the opinions of the members of the seminar. Students earn double-credit for seminars and should expect twice the work normally done in a course. The external examination, both written and oral, is the capstone of the honors experience.

Admission to the Honors Program

Because of the nature of different instructional formats (e.g., seminars) and of the culminating exercise in the Honors Program, the department expects applicants to this program to have at least a B+/B average in religion courses as well as an overall average above the College graduation requirement for admission to the Honors Program.

Application Process for the Major or the Minor

Sophomore Paper applications, and other applications to the religion major or minor, should include (1) a one to two paragraph statement that details the applicant's reason for applying to the department (we encourage curricular breadth and diversity of courses) and (2) all students must complete the "Semester-by-Semester Course Planning" form. This form must be filled out as a supplement to the Sophomore Paper Statement.

Please note: All religion majors must take RELG 095 Religion Café: Senior Symposium in the fall of senior year.

Transfer Credit

For policy regarding domestic study or any summer study see the Registrar's Office and website: Policies, "Transfer Credit Policy - Credit for Work Done Elsewhere."

Off-Campus Study

In many cases, credit may be earned in the Religion Department for study abroad or at other institutions in this country. Typically, the Religion Department will approve a maximum of 2 religion credits for off-campus study. For international study during the academic year, see the Off-Campus Study Office and website. In addition, students who are seeking credit for study to be completed at other institutions should consult with the Religion Department off-campus study representative prior to enrolling in courses. In order to seek credit for any work completed while away from Swarthmore the general policy is that students must have the Registrar's or Off-Campus Study Office's approval form signed by the Religion Department representative prior to undertaking the course or courses.

Further Notes about International Off-Campus Study:

1. Prior to the international study opportunity, speak with the Faculty Adviser for Off-Campus Study, or with Rosa Bernard, Assistant Director for Off-Campus Study, in the Off-Campus Study office. Carefully review all material received from the Off-Campus Study Office.
2. Complete the "Application for Pre-Estimation of Study Abroad Credit." This will include getting signatures from representatives in departments from which you will be requesting credit.
3. While away, contact the Religion Department if any changes are made to the pre-approved schedule.
4. During your study away from Swarthmore, keep all relevant course material including syllabi, class notes, papers, and examinations, etc.
5. At the beginning of the semester after your return, meet with an Off-Campus Study Office staff member to organize your materials for evaluation for credit.
6. Complete the "Record of Departmental Materials Submission" (available at the Off-Campus Study Office). At the time you submit all supporting documents (e.g., syllabi, papers, examinations, class notes, etc.) to the Religion Department, have this form signed by the Religion Department representative who oversees transfer credit requests in religion.
7. The Religion Department will then consider credit award and will send the student, the Registrar, and the Off-Campus Study Office its decision. At this time, you may pick up your supporting materials in the Religion Department Office.

Projected Course Offerings: Fall 2014 to Spring 2016

The following list will be affected by sabbatical leaves and changes in faculty appointments.

Please note: Occasional preference is given to Honors students for enrollment in oversubscribed seminars integral to their list of preparations. Some seminars are lotteried accordingly. If you are concerned about securing enrollment in a particular Religion seminar, please consider the Honors Program.

For the updated list of Religion courses please see our web page at <http://www.swarthmore.edu/religion.xml>. Note that some course numbers in this list have been changed in relation to course numbers used in previous years.

Fall 2014

- RELG 003. The Bible: In the Beginning... (Kessler, Gwynn)
- RELG 010. African American Religions (Chireau, Yvonne)
- RELG 011. FYS: Religion and the Meaning of Life
- RELG 011B. The Religion of Islam: The Islamic Humanities (W) (al-Jamil, Tariq)
- RELG 015B. Philosophy of Religion (cross-listed as PHIL 016) (Wallace, Mark)
- RELG 019. FYS: Religion and Food (Chireau, Yvonne)
- RELG 053. Gender, Sexuality, and the Body in Islamic Discourses (al-Jamil, Tariq)
- RELG 059. Hebrew for Text Study II (Plotkin, Helen)
- RELG 093(1). Directed Reading: Readings in Classical Jewish Texts (.5 credit) (Plotkin, Helen)
- RELG 095. Religion Café: Senior Symposium (Kessler, Gwynn)

Seminar

- RELG 114. Love and Religion (Hopkins, Steven)

Spring 2015

- RELG 002. Religion in America (Chireau, Yvonne)
- RELG 005. World Religions (Chireau, Yvonne and Wallace, Mark)
- RELG 008. Patterns of Asian Religions (W) (Hopkins, Steven)
- RELG 008B. The Qur'an and Its Interpreters (al-Jamil, Tariq)
- RELG 021. Prison Letters: Religion and Transformation (Ross, Ellen)
- RELG 030. Power of Images: Icons and Iconoclasts (Hopkins, Steven)
- RELG 038. Religion and Film (Chireau, Yvonne)
- RELG 042. Cross-listed as DANC 038. Performing Ecstasy, Dancing the Sacred (Chakravorty, Pallabi)
- RELG 043. Cross-listed as LASC 025. In Quest of God: The Latin American Religious Arena
- RELG 057. Hebrew for Text Study I (cross-listed as LING 007) (Plotkin, Helen)
- RELG 093(1). Directed Reading: Readings in Classical Jewish Texts (.5 credit) (Plotkin, Helen)

Seminars

- RELG 112. Postmodern Religious Thought (Wallace, Mark)
- RELG 119. Islamic Law and Society (al-Jamil, Tariq)

Fall 2015

- RELG 001. Religion and Human Experience (Hopkins, Steven)
- RELG 003. The Bible: In the Beginning... (Kessler, Gwynn)
- RELG 011B. The Religion of Islam: The Islamic Humanities (W) (al-Jamil, Tariq)
- RELG 019. FYS: Religion and Food (Chireau, Yvonne)
- RELG 020. Christian Mysticism (Ross, Ellen)
- RELG 024. From Vodun to Voodoo: African Religions in the Old and New Worlds (Chireau, Yvonne)
- RELG 053. Gender, Sexuality, and the Body in Islamic Discourses (al-Jamil, Tariq)
- RELG 059. Hebrew for Text Study II (Plotkin, Helen)
- RELG 093(1). Directed Reading: Readings in Classical Jewish Texts (.5 credit) (Plotkin, Helen)
- RELG 095. Religion Café: Senior Symposium (Hopkins, Steven)

Seminar

- RELG 108. Poets, Saints, and Storytellers (Hopkins, Steven)

Spring 2016

- RELG 006B. The Talmud (new course) (Kessler, Gwynn)
RELG 008. Patterns of Asian Religion (W) (Hopkins, Steven)
RELG 025. Black Women and Religion in the United States (Chireau, Yvonne)
RELG 027. Radical Jesus (Wallace, Mark)
RELG 030. Power of Images: Icons and Iconoclasts (Hopkins, Steven)
RELG 032. Queering God (Kessler, Gwynn)
RELG 038. Religion and Film (Chireau, Yvonne)
RELG 044. Religion/Comics Graphica (new course) (Chireau, Yvonne)
RELG 054. Power and Authority in Modern Islamic Discourses (al-Jamil, Tariq)
RELG 057. Hebrew for Text Study I (cross-listed as LING 007) (Plotkin, Helen)
RELG 093(1). Directed Reading: Readings in Classical Jewish Texts (.5 credit) (Plotkin, Helen)

Seminar

- RELG 100. Holy War, Martyrdom, and Suicide in Christianity, Judaism and Islam (al-Jamil, Tariq)