

RELIGIOUS STUDIES (REL)

Master of Arts

Overview

The program provides students an opportunity to forge a unique, creative, and rigorous program of study. The degree can serve either as a terminal degree or as preparation for a doctoral program. It emphasizes the comparative and theoretical study of religion in its various traditions and forms. Reflecting the teaching and research interests of the current graduate faculty in the department, the program fosters interdisciplinary approaches, offering training in traditional and contemporary theories and methods in conjunction with substantive investigations of diverse religious traditions and topics. Students are encouraged to make imaginative use of all available resources in the creation of their own distinctive programs of study. Typically, this would involve:

1. a focus on a particular religious culture/region or historical period, and
2. an approach or approaches to the study of the subject area.

For students interested in the Religion and Public Engagement Concentration, please see page 123.

The Master of Arts in Religion program began in 1967.

Programs

- Religious Studies, MA (<https://bulletin.wfu.edu/graduate/programs/degree-programs/religious-studies/religious-studies-ma/>)
- Religious Studies, JD/MA (<https://bulletin.wfu.edu/graduate/programs/dual-degrees/religious-studies-jd-ma/>)

Courses

In the list of courses offered with graduate credit, not every course is scheduled every year, but usually 1-2 courses at the 700-level are offered each year, including REL 700. In addition, we encourage students to approach individual professors to teach 700-level directed reading courses on specific topics. Substantive efforts are made to offer courses that are needed by students in either graduate course of study, and student input is welcome in determining the course schedule from semester to semester.

REL 600. Approaches to the Study of Religion. (3 h)

A phenomenological study of different ways of defining religion, including views of representative philosophers, psychologists, sociologists, anthropologists, theologians, and historians of religion.

REL 604. Myth, Ritual, and Symbolism. (3 h)

Explores how people envision and manipulate the supernatural in cross-cultural perspective. Emphasizes functional aspects of religious beliefs and practices.

REL 605. Ethnography of Religion. (3 h)

Study of theory and method in ethnography of religion where students closely read ethnographies from a variety of cultures and discuss the practical, methodological, and ethical issues related to ethnography. Course culminates with students researching and writing their own ethnographies.

REL 606. Ritual Studies. (3 h)

An introduction to the various methods and theories employed in the field of ritual studies, while examining comparative rituals and ritualized practices from around the world.

REL 607. Magic, Science, and Religion. (3 h)

Explores concepts of magic, science, and religion that emerged in Western thought and culture from late antiquity through the European Enlightenment and analyzes connections between religious traditions and Western, Modern Science.

REL 608. Sacred Scripture in the Tradition of Abraham. (3 h)

Comparative study of sacred texts in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam with particular attention to the issues of authority, function, and interpretations.

REL 610. The Prophetic Literature. (3 h)

Examination of the development and theological contents of the literary products of Israel's prophetic movement.

REL 612. The Critical Study of the Pentateuch. (3 h)

Study of the five traditional books of Moses (the Torah) and various lines of analysis that modern Biblical critics have used to interpret their composition and role in the development of Israelite theological thought.

REL 613. Near Eastern Archeology. (3 h)

Survey of twentieth-century archeology in the Near East with attention to its importance for Biblical studies.

REL 615. Field Research in Biblical Archeology. (3 h)

Study of the religion and culture of the ancient Near East through the excavation and interpretation of ancient sites.

REL 616. Field Research in Biblical Archeology. (3 h)

Study of the religion and culture of the ancient Near East through the excavation and interpretation of ancient sites.

REL 617. The Wisdom Literature. (3 h)

Examination of the development, literary characteristics, and theological contents of the works of ancient Israel's sages.

REL 618. Feminist and Contemporary Interpretations of the Bible. (3 h)

Study of feminist and contemporary approaches to the Bible in light of the history of interpretation and a range of contemporary concerns and interpretive contexts.

REL 620. The Search for Jesus. (3 h)

Introduction to the issues, assumptions, evidence, and debate that shapes the continuing quest for the historical Jesus.

REL 623. Jesus Traditions. (3 h)

Examines ancient Christian and other religious representations of Jesus in historical, social, cultural and theological context.

REL 624. Early Christian Literature. (3 h)

Examination of various literature and perspectives of the first three centuries of the Christian movement.

REL 628. Jewish-Christian Relations and the New Testament. (3 h)

Study of Jewish-Christian relations and selected writings of the New Testament in the historical, social, religious and political contexts of ancient Judaism and emerging Christianity. Focus varies with instructor.

REL 629. Chinese Medicine. (3 h)

An interdisciplinary exploration and analysis of Chinese medicine, its fundamental theories, and its range of health-oriented and religious applications.

REL 630. Pope, Jefferson & Imam: A Study In Comparative Ethics. (3 h)

Comparative study of the moral values and socio-ethical positions in the major religious traditions of the world, with focus on their various methods of reasoning and sources of authority.

REL 631. Religion and Law. (3 h)

A study of religion and law as distinct yet interdependent spheres that influence cultural negotiations about authority, power, identity, and the regulation of society. Geographic and tradition-specific focus may vary with instructor.

REL 632. Religion and Public Engagement. (3 h)

This seminar introduces students to dynamics at work at the interface between religious communities and the public sphere. It will explore, through a wide range of readings, guest lectures, and films, the potential for social change—constructive and destructive—within and between communities in locally, regionally, nationally and globally.

REL 635. Christian Ethics and the Problem of War. (3 h)

Examination of the causes and characteristics of war, various Christian responses to it, and approaches to peacemaking, with attention to selected contemporary issues.

REL 636. Religious Traditions and Human Rights. (3 h)

Study of the relationships and tensions between religious traditions and human rights, with illustrations from historical and contemporary issues and movements.

REL 638. Religion Ethics and Politics. (3 h)

Examination of ethical issues in religion and politics using materials from a variety of sources and historical periods.

REL 639. Religion, Power and Society in Modern Africa. (3 h)

Interdisciplinary study of the growth transformations of Africa's major religious traditions (Christianity, Islam, and the indigenous religions) and of their relations with secular social changes.

REL 641. Religion and Ecology. (3 h)

Cross-cultural examination of the relationships among human beings, their diverse cultures, habitats, and religions, including social and political understandings of the environment.

REL 642. Religious Intolerance in U.S.. (3 h)

Study of the various manifestations of religious intolerance in the U.S. from the colonial period until the present.

REL 643. Religion, Culture, and the Body. (3 h)

A cross-cultural, multi-disciplinary exploration of the body as a malleable locus of contested ideals that informs personal, social, and religious identity formation.

REL 644. Religion, Poverty, and Social Entrepreneurship. (3 h)

Interdisciplinary study of major themes in religion, poverty, reduction, and social entrepreneurship. Focus and community emphasis may vary with instructor.

REL 645. The African American Religious Experience. (3 h)

Exploration of the religious dimensions of African-American life from its African antecedents to contemporary figures and movements.

REL 647. Religion, Gender, & Sexuality. (3 h)

This course explores how "religion" regulates gender and sexuality by examining religious texts, media, and political rhetoric through feminist, queer, and postcolonial theory. Through an analysis of historical and contemporary debates and issues concerning gender and sexuality, this course considers how political, social, and religious institutions understand and deploy religious belief and discourse to legislate, repress, and pathologize certain criminal, deviant, immoral, or sinful.

REL 648. Race, Memory, and Identity. (3 h)

Explores the collective memory and identity of American-Indian and African-American communities and their response to historical trauma in their cultural imagination, spirituality, and political and social activism.

REL 649. Asian Meditation Practices. (3 h)

Introduces and examines theoretical and practical aspects of various forms of Eastern meditation (concentration, mindfulness, Zen, visualization, and moving energy work) from both practitioner and modern scientific perspectives.

REL 651. Sociology of Religion. (3 h)

Introduces the sociological analysis of religion, including religious beliefs and experiences, the cultural context of religion, varieties of religious organization, religious change and social change.

REL 655. Jewish Identities: Religion, Race, and Rights. (3 h)

Examines how evolving definitions of race, religion, and Jewishness have correlated and conflicted in varied and sometimes surprising ways and how these shifts have been tied to legal rights and social privileges.

REL 656. Faces of Modern Judaism. (3 h)

Examines contemporary expressions of Judaism and its historical roots.

REL 657. Jews in the United States. (3 h)

Focusing on the 19th-21st centuries, this course examines Jewish American histories, experiences, and identities, as well as their impact on American society as a whole.

REL 659. Hinduism in America. (3 h)

Study of the meanings, values, and practices associated with the religions of Hinduism in dialogue with the dominant culture of America.

REL 660. Hindus, Muslims, and Sikhs in North America. (3 h)

This course examines the racialization of Hinduism, Islam, Sikhism in North America. Through an analysis of historical documents, immigration laws, mainstream and social media, popular culture, and academic texts, this class explores how these religions are racialized in Canada and the US. Using a postcolonial and intersectional approach, we will examine how race, religion, gender, sexuality, and class interact to stigmatize or empower certain individuals and/or groups.

REL 661. Topics in Buddhism. (3 h)

Variable topics in buddhist history, thought, and/or practice. May be repeated for credit if topic varies.

REL 662. Topics in Islam. (3 h)

Examination of the origins and development of Islam, the world's second largest religious tradition. Attention is given to the formation of Islamic faith and practice as well as contemporary manifestations of Islam in Asia, Africa, and North America. May be repeated for credit if topic varies.

REL 663. Religions of Japan. (3 h)

Study of the central religious traditions of Japan from pre-history to the present, including Shinto, Buddhism, Zen Buddhism, Christianity, and Confucianism.

REL 665. History of Religion in America. (3 h)

Study of American religions from colonial times until the present.

REL 667. Contemplative Traditions In Christianity. (3 h)

Study of Christian mysticism and contemplation (spirit possession, visions, dreams, and meditation) and their relation to contemporary issues.

REL 668. The Protestant and Catholic Reformations. (3 h)

Study of the origin and development of Reformation theology and ecclesiology.

REL 669. Radical Christian Movements. (3 h)

Study of selected radical movements in the Christian tradition and their relation to contemporary issues.

REL 672. History of Christian Thought. (1.5, 3 h)

Study of recurring patterns in Christian thought across time and cultures and some of the implications of those patterns in representative ancient and modern figures.

REL 672B. History of Christian Thought Medieval and Reformation Thought. (1.5 h)

Study of the history of Christian thought, beginning with its Hebraic and Greek backgrounds and tracing its rise and development to modern times. The course may be divided into halves for 1.5 credits each: a) Patristic Thought and b) Medieval and Reformation Thought.

REL 673. Special Topics in African-American Religious Traditions. (3 h)

Variable topics in African-American religious traditions. May be repeated for credit if topic varies.

REL 674. Black Messiahs and Uncle Toms. (3 h)

Examines the cultural and religious history of black leadership in the United States.

REL 675. Race, Myth, and the American Imagination. (3 h)

A study of myth and mythology in relation to the racial imaginary in America.

REL 676. Race, Religion, and Film. (3 h)

Examines past and contemporary filmmakers who couple religious themes with racial concerns.

REL 678. Latin American Liberation Theology. (3 h)

Historical, contextual, and theoretical survey of diverse forms of Latin American theologies of liberation.

REL 681. Zen Buddhism. (3 h)

An examination of the origins and development of Zen Buddhism from China (Ch'an) to Japan and contemporary America. Particular attention is given to Zen doctrine and practice in the context of the broader Buddhist tradition.

REL 682. Religion and Culture in China. (3 h)

A thematic study of Chinese religious traditions and culture focusing on history, ritual, scripture, and popular practice. Topics include cosmology, ancestor veneration, shamanism, divination, and the role of women. Ford.

REL 683. The Qur'an & the Prophet. (3 h)

Examines the history, content, and main approaches to the sacred book of Islam. Explores the influence and interaction between the holy word and its transmitter the Prophet Muhammad.

REL 684. Islam and Law: Varieties in Interpretation and Expression. (3 h)

Explores main tenets of the Islamic law (Shari'ah) and how this law has been applied in past and present Islamic societies. Looks at legal issues through the lens of gender, ethics, non-muslim minorities, rights, and duties.

REL 685. Topics in South Asian Religions. (3 h)

Variable topics in the religions of South Asia. May be repeated for credit if topic varies.

REL 686. Indian Epics. (3 h)

Examines one or both Indian epics, the Mahabharata and Ramayana, while paying attention to either epic's religious, social, and political contexts, performance, and development in Indian history.

REL 687. Priests, Warriors and Ascetics in Ancient India. (3 h)

Introduces students to the history, culture and religious traditions of ancient India by examining the overlapping practices, beliefs, ideologies, and gender representations of priests, warriors, kings, and ascetics.

REL 688. South Asian Women: Religion, Culture and Politics. (3 h)

This course examines the intersection of religion, race, and gender of South Asian women from a feminist and postcolonial perspective. This course is cross-listed as WGS 688.

REL 689. Islam in the West: Changes and Challenges. (3 h)

Explores issues of identity, ethnicity and religion within various Muslim communities living in western countries. A central goal is to understand how these communities negotiate the new environment and the challenges they face.

REL 690. Spec Topics in Religion. (1.5-3 h)

Religion topics of special interest. May be repeated for credit.

REL 691. Topics in East Asian Religions. (3 h)

Variable topics in the religions of China, Korea, and Japan. May be repeated if topic varies.

REL 692. Topics in First Peoples' Traditions. (3 h)

Variable topics in the religions of American Indian and Canadian First Nations. May be repeated for credit if topic varies.

REL 693. Topics in Religions of Africa. (3 h)

Variable topics in the religions of Africa or African diaspora. May be repeated for credit if topic varies.

REL 695. Exploring Interfaith Practice and Leadership. (3 h)

This online course on interfaith leadership invites students to consider how they might engage most effectively with people from a variety of religious backgrounds.

REL 696. Interreligious Encounters and Engagements. (3 h)

Surveys the history of dialogue activities among various religious communities and introduces the methods and theories of interreligious dialogues. Part of this class is interaction with local interfaith projects.

REL 700. Theory and Method in the Study of Religion. (3 h)

Explores the history of and methodological resources for the study of religion. Focus may vary according to the instructor, but the emphasis is on the ways religion has been defined, studied and interpreted over the last several centuries.

REL 701. Directed Reading. (1-3 h)

May be repeated for credit if topic varies.

REL 702. Directed Reading. (1-3 h)

May be repeated for credit if topic varies.

REL 703. Postmodern Perspective on Power, Symbolism and Performance. (3 h)

A critical examination of postmodern theories on the relationship between religion and culture.

REL 704. Conceptions of the Ultimate. (3 h)

A comparative study of religious conceptions of the ultimate (divine, sacred) within Eastern and Western traditions through a range of methodological lenses including phenomenological, philosophical, theological, and sociological.

REL 705. Research in Religion. (3 h)

Tools and methodologies applicable to research in religion. Fulfills the three hours in research methods that the religion department requires of first-year MA students.

REL 708. Religion Language & Symbol. (3 h)

An examination of the distinct use of language in religious discourse, with attention to theoretical understandings of human language, the variety of philosophical efforts to define the validity of religious language, and the role of metaphor and analogy in religious communication.

REL 709. Field Program in Religion and Public Engagement. (1-3 h)

Integrated study of major themes in religion and public engagement carried out in partnership with one or more communities off campus. Focus varies with instructor. On request.

REL 716. Old Testament Theology. (3 h)

Major motifs of revelation in the Old Testament; analysis of recent attempts to write Old Testament theology.

REL 718. Old Testament Exegesis. (3 h)

Detailed analysis and exegesis of selected portions of the Hebrew Bible. P-Biblical Hebrew.

REL 719. Old Testament Exegesis. (3 h)

Detailed analysis and exegesis of selected portions of the Hebrew Bible. P-Biblical Hebrew.

REL 720. The History of Biblical Interpretation. (3 h)

A detailed study of the history of biblical interpretation and hermeneutics.

REL 721. New Testament Theology. (3 h)

Delineation of an approach to New Testament theology as a whole, a consideration of the hermeneutical problem, and an examination of two or three themes in New Testament theology.

REL 723. New Testament Exegesis. (3 h)

Examination of selected portions of the Greek New Testament, with attention to the tools necessary for exegesis. P-Koine Greek.

REL 724. New Testament Exegesis. (3 h)

Examination of selected portions of the Greek New Testament, with attention to the tools necessary for exegesis. P-Koine Greek.

REL 726. Seminar in Early Christianity Studies. (3 h)

Intensive study of selected topics and texts in early Christianity studies.

REL 737. Figures and Traditions in Religious Ethics. (3 h)

Seminar course that examines the basic ethical works and theories of central figures in Western and non-Western traditions. Students engage in close readings of important texts in religious thought and morality and produce essays reflecting on the themes addressed by the authors.

REL 738. Seminar in Christian Social Ethics. (3 h)

Critical study of classic texts and figures in the history of Christian ethics and social thought.

REL 740. Seminar in the Sociology of Religion. (3 h)

Examination of selected classical and contemporary texts illustrative of the theories, methods, and purposes of the sociological study of religion.

REL 751. Theory and Practice of Pastoral Counseling. (3 h)

Study of counseling methodologies, psychotherapeutic techniques, personal development, and human behavior in terms of the implications for pastoral counseling.

REL 755. Clinical Pastoral Education. (3 h)

Clinical experience in pastoral care, including work in crisis situations, seminars, interdisciplinary clinical group sessions, formal pastoral counseling, urban ministry assignments, and participation in group therapy. (Both semesters must be completed.)

REL 756. Clinical Pastoral Education. (3 h)

Clinical experience in pastoral care, including work in crisis situations, seminars, interdisciplinary clinical group sessions, formal pastoral counseling, urban ministry assignments, and participation in group therapy. (Both semesters must be completed.)

REL 761. Seminar in Eastern Religion. (3 h)

Directed study in the selected areas of the religious traditions of the East.

REL 762. Literature of Ancient Judaism. (3 h)

Examination of the rabbinic writings (Mishnah, Tosefta, Talmud, Midrashim, Targumim, and the Liturgy), the Dead Sea Scrolls, The Old Testament Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha, and the literature of Hellenistic Judaism (e.g., Philo and Josephus).

REL 763. Hellenistic Religions. (3 h)

Considerations of available source materials, questions of method, and bibliography related to such Hellenistic religions as the Mysterics, Hellenistic Judaism, and Gnosticism.

REL 766. Seminar in Christian History. (3 h)

Directed study of selected areas in the history of Christianity, including Baptist history.

REL 768. The Protestant and Catholic Reformations. (3 h)

Study of the origin and development of Reformation theology and ecclesiology.

REL 771. Religions in America. (3 h)

A study of religious traditions, events, and individuals shaping religious life in America. Attention is given to native religious, colonization, denominations, awakenings, religious liberty, the western movement, and the rise of the "American Self." The development of pluralism and the impact of immigration, civil rights, and "new religions" are also studied.

REL 775. Seminar in the History of Christian Thought. (3 h)

Intensive study of a selected period or movement in Christian theological history, with special reference to seminal persons and writings.

REL 780. Seminar in Theology & Lit. (3 h)

Intensive study of a single theologian in relation to a literary figure with a similar religious outlook, the aim being to investigate how literature and theology mutually invigorate and call each other into question. Representative pairings: Niebuhr/Auden, Barth/O'Connor, Tillich/Updike, Newman/Eliot, Kierkegaard/Percy. May be repeated for credit if the writers studied are different.

REL 781. Special Topics in Religion. (3 h)

An intensive, in-depth study of a selected issue in the study of religion. Focus varies with instructor. May be repeated if topic varies.

REL 791. Thesis Research I. (1-9 h)

May be repeated for credit. Satisfactory/Unsatisfactory.

REL 792. Thesis Research II. (1-9 h)

May be repeated for credit. Satisfactory/Unsatisfactory.

Faculty

Program Director Mary Foskett

Chair Lynn Neal

Associate Chair Mary Foskett

Professors Stephen Boyd, Jay Ford, Mary Foskett, Kenneth Høglund,

Simeon Ilesanmi, Lynn Neal, Nelly van Doorn-Harder, Jarrod Whitaker

Associate Professors Lucas Johnston, Ron Neal

Associate Teaching Professor Tanisha Ramachandran

Assistant Professor Annalise Glauz-Todrank

Emeritus Professor Fred Horton