

# Religion

While the subject matter can vary widely from one area of study to another, all religion courses reflect a similar concern: the relation of the students to fundamental questions of meaning, purpose, and value in their lives. Study in religion is offered in each of the four years. The courses assume no prior knowledge or study of religion and may be taken in any order appropriate to the student's grade level:

**JUNIOR:** Religion 110, 120, 210, 220, 240, 290

**LOWER:** Religion 110, 120, 210, 220, 240, 260, 270, 290

**UPPER:** Religion 260, 270, 310, 311, 312, 320, 330, 340, 410, 420, 421, 490, 493, 494

**SENIOR:** Religion 310, 311, 312, 320, 330, 340, 410, 420, 421, 490, 493, 494

*The course in psychology, an affiliated course under the aegis of the Religion Department, is listed on the preceding page.*

## **REL110: HEBREW BIBLE/OLD TESTAMENT**

*"In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. . . ."* So begins one of the most influential books in human history. From ancient times until the present, Jews, Christians, and Muslims have grappled with the cosmic questions, universal myths, compelling laws, and dramatic narratives of the Hebrew Bible, also known as the Old Testament. It is a book that is both timeless and timely. In this course, students will gain an appreciation of the historical, political, and social context from which the Hebrew Bible emerged, and will explore the narratives' eternal themes such as creation and destruction, rivalry and loyalty, love and betrayal, doubt and faith, freedom and captivity, forgiveness and revenge, and heroes and villains, as well as delve into the ethical and legal teachings that have served as one foundation for Western civilization. *Open to Juniors and Loweres. Offered: Fall Term*

## **REL120: RELIGIOUS TRADITIONS IN AMERICA**

This course examines several of the religious traditions that make up the American religious and cultural landscape, with particular emphasis given to Judaism, Protestant and Roman Catholic Christianity, and Islam. The distinctive ethos and practices of each are explored, as is their relationship to each other. Attention is given to the students' understanding of their own traditions in relation to the diversity of religious expression today. *Open to Juniors and Loweres.*

## **REL210: THE NEW TESTAMENT**

Recently, *The Da Vinci Code* and *Holy Blood, Holy Grail* have sparked questions about Jesus, the New Testament, and secret gospels from the early Christian period. In this course we will read and explore the New Testament, which has been called "the most widely read, quoted, debated, maligned, and believed book in Western civilization." We will study the life of Jesus, the travels and letters of Paul, and the book of Revelation, and will consider these both in their historical context and in contemporary literature and films. *Open to Juniors and Loweres. Offered: Winter and Spring Terms.*

## **REL220: THE EXPERIENCE OF RELIGION**

Students examine the nature and quality of religious experience by reading biography, fiction, and plays. Class discussions help students explore the meaning of faith and spirituality. Readings may include works by such authors as Alan Paton, Elie Wiesel, Alice Walker, Par Lagerkvist, and Frederick Buechner. *Open to Juniors and Loweres.*

## **REL240: RELIGION AND POPULAR CULTURE**

The images, ideas, and symbol systems of religion surround us in popular culture, whether in movies, television shows, sports, celebrities, fashion, the Internet, and popular music and literature. From the Disney films to the Harry Potter novels, from Madonna to Kanye West, from *Whale Rider* to *The Simpsons*, the materials for this course will be drawn from the numerous manifestations of religion in our ever-changing popular American culture. The purpose of this course is to introduce students to the academic study of religion. Students will explore such challenging topics such as the problem of evil, the afterlife, the nature of the sacred, and one's purpose in life, evaluating various religious responses as well as popular culture's commentary. The course will culminate in each student presenting his or her own personal exploration of the expression of religion and popular culture. *Open to Juniors and Loweres.*

## **REL260: JUDAISM**

This course focuses on the development of Judaism from the biblical period to the present, exploring the historical evolution of Jewish holidays, life-cycle rituals, and Jewish law. Students will read materials from the Hebrew Bible, rabbinic writings such as the Talmud, and contemporary Judaic scholars. Discussion topics include American Jewry, Zionism, anti-semitism and the Holocaust, and the emergence of the State of Israel. Students will also have the opportunity to cook and eat Jewish food, experience Jewish arts and culture, meet a rabbi, and visit a local synagogue. *Open to Loweres and Uppers. Offered: Winter Term.*

### **REL270: ISLAM**

This course provides an opportunity for an in-depth study of the origins, beliefs, practices, and spread of Islam. Students will have an opportunity to deepen their understanding of this religion as they read the Koran. Questions raised will include: How does Islam relate to the other monotheistic religions? What does it mean to be a Muslim in various historical and cultural contexts? What are the implications of the Sunni Shiite split? A primary teaching tool is the research paper, in which students choose an aspect of Muslim history, politics, art, or culture to explore more fully. *Open to Lower and Uppers. Offered: Fall Term.*

### **REL290: SELECTED TOPICS IN RELIGION**

This course is offered at student or departmental initiative. *Open to Juniors and Lower.*

### **REL310: SOCIAL ETHICS: VALUES IN A CHANGING WORLD**

In this course, students examine various contemporary social issues such as changing birth technologies, abortion, genetic engineering, euthanasia, censorship, welfare reform, legalizing drugs, animal rights, and the death penalty. The course provides students with the conceptual tools and practical information necessary to evaluate the changes in these aspects of modern life. *Open to Uppers and Seniors.*

### **REL311: GLOBAL ETHICS: WHAT'S WRONG WITH THE WORLD?**

Poverty, famine, disease, increasing disparities in wealth and income, depleted natural resources, degradation of the environment and the natural world, shifting global alliances, and other intractable world problems—what kind of a world do we live in? What kind of a world *should* we live in? How do we define and pursue justice—is it relative or absolute? What have we done with our world/what should we do in our world, what do/should we eat, how do/should we live, what do/should we consume, what are/should be our values? This course will read authors in the forefront of social and ethical analysis, such as Jared Diamond, Peter Singer, Lester Brown and others, as we work our way through to developing appropriate responses to the global crises of this and the next generation—in population, the environment, energy, pollution, climate, health and wealth, and many others. The course will include work with current news sources—both national and international—and each student will develop a project of his/her own choosing. *Open to Uppers and Seniors. Offered: Fall and Winter Terms.*

### **REL312: THE ETHICS OF THE MARKETPLACE**

This course considers ethical issues in the world of business and management. Students will debate the moral aspects of institutional policies and practices in such areas as the environment, fair labor, executive compensation, affirmative action, advertising, insider trading, whistleblowing, and the corporate responsibilities of multinational firms. Readings will include both the theory of ethical decision-making and case studies with current examples of ethical issues in business. *Open to Uppers and Seniors.*

### **REL320: ASIAN RELIGIONS**

Of the almost seven billion people in the world, one-third are adherents of Asian religions, including Hinduism, Buddhism, Taoism, and Confucianism. This course will introduce students to the distinctive ethos of Asian philosophies and ways of life. Students will encounter the concepts of ultimate reality, the self, and the purpose of human life that have informed diverse ethical systems and cultures in India, China, Tibet, Korea, Japan, and Southeast Asia. In this course, we will study the ideas, symbols, practices, and development of traditions that have shaped a continent and have found new expressions in today's world. *Open to Uppers and Seniors. Offered: Fall and Spring Terms.*

### **REL330: READING THE BIBLE AS LITERATURE**

The Bible is cited on the floor of the US Senate, quoted from the bench in the courtroom, referenced on news programs analyzing the conflicts in the Middle East, and alluded to in Western literature. Even though the Bible is the most familiar book in the English-speaking world, it remains one of the most confusing, misquoted, misunderstood, highly contested tomes ever written. This course will focus on the major stories, personalities and themes from the Hebrew Bible and the Christian Scriptures (Old and New Testaments). Through examination of the biblical texts as well as art, literature, and music influenced by these texts, students will become familiar with the people, ideas, and experiences critical to understanding much of Western culture. Designed for those who have not taken a lower-level Bible course. *Open to Uppers and Seniors. Offered: Fall and Spring Terms.*

### **REL340: GOD AND POLITICS IN CONTEMPORARY AMERICA**

Intelligent design and the teaching of evolution, homosexuality and the definition of marriage, abortion and the right to life, the Pledge of Allegiance in the schools, the Ten Commandments in the courthouse, apocalyptic predictions in literature and film, varied responses to the environmental crisis, and increasing religious diversity intersecting a vision of the United States as a Christian nation—it is hard to open a newspaper without seeing the controversial confluence of religion and politics in the United States today. Where have these conflicts come from? This course begins with the study of Christian fundamentalism and the social gospel as articulated early in the 20th century, and examines some of the more recent voices in religion that influence political and social life in contemporary America. *Open to Uppers and Seniors. Offered in Spring Term.*

### **REL410: PERSONHOOD AND BELIEF**

This course offers varied psychological and theological perspectives on human behavior from birth to death. Students attempt to define religion and study the development of the religious self-consciousness as it emerges in the individual. Readings include selections from the writings of major figures in contemporary psychology and theology as well as from recent fiction. *Open to Uppers and Seniors with preference to Seniors in the Fall.*

### **REL420: INTRODUCTION TO PHILOSOPHY**

This course follows a topical approach to the history of Western philosophy and focuses on such issues as metaphysics, epistemology, the problem of evil, and the philosophical roots of ethics. Students will read from the works of ancient and modern writers such as Plato, Aristotle, Aquinas, Kant, Hume, Bentham, and Locke to assist them in coming to their own understanding of these topics. Students will discover what philosophy is and how philosophers question and reason. *Open to Uppers and Seniors.*

### **REL421: EXISTENTIALISM**

Focusing primarily on the 19th- and 20th-century literature of that group of writers called the existentialists, this course explores the philosophical and theological issues associated with the problem of faith and meaning in today's world. Reading authors such as Kierkegaard, Dostoevsky, Kafka, Sartre, Beckett, and Camus, the student compares a traditional understanding of God, man, and the world with other views which challenge, confirm, or translate it into another idiom. *Open to Uppers and Seniors.*

### **REL490: SELECTED TOPICS IN RELIGION**

This course is offered at student or departmental initiative and may change from year to year. *Open to Uppers and Seniors.*

### **REL493: THE HOLOCAUST: THE HUMAN CAPACITY FOR GOOD AND EVIL**

In this course, the Holocaust is examined from the perspective of the human capacity for good and evil. The religious and historical sources of anti-Semitism are examined as background to the events of the 1930s and '40s. What happened during the Holocaust and the ways people in the middle of it responded make up the focus of the course. *Open to Seniors (and Uppers with the permission of the instructor).*

### **REL494: ZEN BUDDHISM**

“What is the sound of one hand clapping?” and “What was your original face before your parents were born?” are two of the most famous Zen training riddles called koans. This course will explore the religious tradition known as Zen Buddhism, especially as it is practiced in Japan. Through a reading of primary sources, both ancient and modern, including many koans, students are introduced to the distinctive ethos and practice of Zen. The manifestations of Zen in Japanese culture—the tea ceremony, landscape gardening, the martial arts, Noh theater, flower arranging, and calligraphy—will also be studied to help introduce the student to a non-Western method of experiencing reality. *Open to Uppers and Seniors. Offered: Winter Term.*