

# RELIGIOUS STUDIES (RELS)

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## **RELS 1251 Religion in Contemporary Culture**

3 credit hours

This course explores the role of religion in contemporary culture, particularly North American culture. Portrayals of religious people as well as the employment of symbols and themes from various world religions will be identified within selected pieces of contemporary art, film, literature, music, Internet, and other media. We will also consider emerging religious trends and whether certain cultural practices are functioning in a religious role.

## **RELS 1252 Religious Diversity in Canada**

3 credit hours

Religious diversity in Canada has come to incorporate Hindus, Buddhists, Muslims, multiple denominations of Christianity and many new religious movements. Students examine both the history of religious diversity in Canada and the impact of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms and the Legislation that promotes Multiculturalism. Selected examples of how new religious traditions are adapting in Canadian Society will also be studied.

## **RELS 1351 Love**

3 credit hours

Our culture has represented love, variously, as effecting self-fulfillment, the affirmation of another personality, union with deity, merit for a future life; or, as sex, a passing neurosis, an unreasoned self-annihilation, or a social contrivance. Students explore the assumptions and implications of these views, particularly as they involve ultimate human concerns, that is, religion.

## **RELS 1352 Death**

3 credit hours

The student considers such questions as what dying is really like, whether dying provides a valuable point of view of living, whether people continue in some form of existence after dying, how one is to understand the symbols in religious talk about death, and why mythologies deal so heavily in death.

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**Courses at the 2000 level may be used by students to complete their humanities requirement or as an elective in their degree program.**

## **RELS 2211 Religious Lives**

3 credit hours

Students draw on literature, biography, and autobiography as an introduction to the many dimensions of the human experience of spirituality and religion across geographies and traditions.

## **RELS 2323 The Islamic Religious Tradition**

3 credit hours

Islam is one of the most rapidly expanding religious traditions in the world. This course will examine the origins of Islam, its fundamental teachings in the Qu'ran and in the works of some of its major teachers. In addition, the course will survey the history of Islam and contemporary developments in selected areas.

## **RELS 2324 Christian Religious Traditions**

3 credit hours

Students are introduced to the origins and some of the developments of the Christian tradition. Attention is paid to the development of Christian communities in different regions around the world, including Africa, Asia, and Latin America.

## **RELS 2326 South Asian Religious Traditions**

3 credit hours

Students are introduced to the diverse religious traditions of South Asia (India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, and Sri Lanka). Students will become familiar with basic concepts, themes, and practices of Hindu, Sikh, Jain, Buddhist, and South Asian Muslim traditions.

## **RELS 2327 The Buddhist Religious Tradition**

3 credit hours

The Buddhist religious tradition was founded in South Asia, spread throughout East and Southeast Asia, and now is growing in the West. Students are introduced to key Buddhist teachings, the transformations they have undergone in different countries, and the development of different sects. Particular attention will be paid to its contemporary cultural dimensions in Asia and in Canada.

## **RELS 2330 Spirituality and Work**

3 credit hours

Is the emerging (or re-emerging) interest in spirituality in the workplace enabling more individual fulfillment and better decision-making or is it creating new conflicts and more exclusionary workplace practices? What influences do religious traditions and worldviews have on how we work together? The increasing globalization of business and communication, the need for more qualified immigrants to Canada, and the growing diversity of people in many workplaces is forcing re-examination of inherited attitudes and expectations about work. These changes require deep understanding of what spirituality, as the deepest source of values, can mean as workplaces change and people make choices about work, vocation, or calling. This course explores the potential, the benefits and the dangers of bringing spirituality into the workplace.

## **RELS 2333 Gender, Sexuality and Religion Today**

3 credit hours

How has religion informed the way that we understand gender and sexuality through time and across cultural contexts? Students take a comparative and multidisciplinary look at some of the prevailing narratives about women, men, creation, morality, and belief in world religions. Students explore issues such as religious leadership, gender rights, sexuality and sexual identity, and reproduction.

## **RELS 2342 Violence**

3 credit hours

How do different religions deal with violence? When is violence justified and towards whom? Students explore religious responses to these questions using a comparative approach. Topics include: religiously justified warfare, terrorism, gendered violence, and the rejection of violence in religious philosophies.

## **RELS 2343 Jewish Religious Tradition**

3 credit hours

How do different religions deal with violence? When is violence justified and towards whom? Students explore religious responses to these questions using a comparative approach. Topics include: religiously justified warfare, terrorism, gendered violence, and the rejection of violence in religious philosophies.

## **RELS 2347 Ecology and Religion**

3 credit hours

The course reviews the phenomenon of human ecology in order to advance to further questions: In the human relationship to nature, does nature have rights? To reduce pollution, may the rich deprive the poor of advanced technology? Is a low-consumption life-style desirable in itself? Should we leave development and progress to the experts? Such questions prepare the ground for a theology that finds religious meaning in the worldly realities of science, commerce, and government.

**RELS 2350 Faith in Action: Religion and Social Movements**

3 credit hours

Students explore the religious dimensions of important social movements throughout the world, such as Engaged Buddhism and the Abolitionist, Anti-colonialism, Peace, Social Gospel, Temperance, and Civil Rights movements. Students will examine the stories of such important activists as Louise McKinney, Mohandas K. Gandhi, Dorothy Day, Martin Luther King Jr., The Dalai Lama, and Thich Nhat Hanh. The emphasis will be on social justice movements. The causes of the rise of reactionary, so-called "fundamentalist" movements will also be considered.

**RELS 2353 New Religious Movements**

3 credit hours

New Religious Movements (sometimes called cults and sects), are a complex and diverse sub-topic. Students explore the ways in which these movements challenge conventional understandings of religious practice and belief, including how religions are defined and the intersection of religion and the modern state.

**RELS 2360 Feasting and Fasting: Religion and Food**

3 credit hours

Food and eating play an important role in religion. In communities around the world, foodways are shaped by religious traditions and practices. Topics such as fasting, the making of offerings, dietary rules, and traditions and restrictions around commensality are examined in several world traditions.

**RELS 2370 Introduction to the Qur'an**

3 credit hours

Students examine the Qur'an as scripture, including sources, structure, style, transmission, sciences, interpretation and basic themes.

**RELS 2377 Introduction to the Bible: Hebrew Scripture**

3 credit hours

The course introduces the Hebrew Scriptures/Old Testament. Students are introduced to the text along with the cultural and historical context of the biblical literature. The course also examines the meaning and relevance of these scriptures for today.

**RELS 2378 Introduction to the Bible: New Testament**

3 credit hours

The course introduces the New Testament scriptures of the Christian tradition. Students are introduced to the text along with the cultural and historical context of the biblical literature. The course examines the meaning and relevance of the New Testament today.

**RELS 2401 Religions of China and Japan**

3 credit hours

Students examine the major religious traditions of Confucianism, Daoism, Buddhism and Shinto, as well as popular manifestations of religion, such as belief in ghosts, ancestor worship, fortune telling, feng shui and spirit possession.

**RELS 2826 Special Topics in Religious Studies**

3 credit hours

These are special topics courses in a specific area of Religious Studies. Topics can vary but reflect the expertise of the instructor and the interests of the student(s).

**RELS 3010 Vietnamese Religious Tradition**

3 credit hours

This course explores religion in the Vietnamese context and how it relates to social issues, like the construction of a national identity, politics and gender. The course will also examine the role religion has played in the lives of overseas Vietnamese.

**RELS 3101 Law and Religion**

3 credit hours

Students are provided with an overview and an exploration of the relationship between law and religion in Canada. Students examine the roots of the common law and its colonial trajectories by studying key cases on abortion, blasphemy, circumcision, divorce and other issues at the intersection of law and religion.

**RELS 3205 The Future**

3 credit hours

**Prerequisite:** 30 credit hours including 3 hours RELS at the 1000 level and 3 hours RELS at the 2000 level

Students examine religious and secular conceptualizations of the future in history, in the contemporary moment, and beyond. Students explore concepts such as eschatology and apocalypticism, perspectives on the nature of time, theories and method for 'reading' the future, and imaginative representations of the future possibilities in literature and film.

**RELS 3220 African Diaspora Religions**

3 credit hours

**Prerequisite:** 3 hours RELS at the 1000 level and 3 hours RELS at the 2000 level, or permission of the instructor

There are diverse religious traditions and practices throughout the African diaspora (Africa, Europe, and the Americas). Topics covered may include: Islam and Christianity in the African diaspora; modern Ifa and Yoruba spiritual religion; Voodoo, Candomble and other Caribbean traditions; Rastafarianism; Pan-Africanism and religion; religion under slavery; racism and religion; religion in the African Nova Scotian community.

**RELS 3303 Christian Origins**

3 credit hours

**Prerequisite:** 30 credit hours including 3 hours RELS at the 1000 level and 3 hours RELS at the 2000 level

This course treats the formation and development of Christianity as seen through the letters of Paul. It examines the origin of Pauline Churches, their separation from Judaism, their struggles, beliefs, and worship.

**RELS 3311 Jesus Of Nazareth**

3 credit hours

**Prerequisite:** 30 credit hours including 3 hours RELS at the 1000 level and 3 hours RELS at the 2000 level

Jesus of Nazareth: Did Jesus really exist? What did he teach? Why was he killed? What does the resurrection mean? In examining these questions, the course will survey the many responses to Jesus' question, "Who do men say that I am?"

**RELS 3312 Theologies of Liberation**

3 credit hours

**Prerequisite:** 30 credit hours including 3 hours RELS at the 1000 level and 3 hours RELS at the 2000 level

How has the life and teaching of Jesus made justice the central issue in Christianity today? What is liberation theology in the third world? Is capitalism opposed to the teaching of Jesus? What is Jesus' teaching about the poor, the oppressed, human rights and violent revolution?

**RELS 3316 Anthropology of Religion [ANTH 3316]**

3 credit hours

**Prerequisite:** any one of ANTH 1202, 1211, 1220, 1221, 1251

This course surveys major developments in the anthropological study of religions. The course will provide a solid theoretical foundation for the field study of contemporary religions.

**RELS 3318 Ghosts: A Cultural Approach**

3 credit hours

**Prerequisite:** 30 credit hours including 3 hours RELS at the 1000 level and 3 hours RELS at the 2000 level

Virtually all cultures hold beliefs of human souls lingering after death and having an effect on the living. Students explore beliefs in ghosts in a cross-cultural context, examining a range of cultural products related to ghosts including movies, folktales, and ghost tourism from around the world. Students also explore anthropological theories regarding beliefs and practices related to ghosts.

**RELS 3328 The Catholic Church Today**

3 credit hours

**Prerequisite:** RELS 2378 or the equivalent

The Catholic Church has radically changed. What does it teach today about faith, revelation, God, Jesus Christ, Sacraments, ethics, and human destiny? Students will be introduced to a brief historical development on each of these teachings.

**RELS 3330 Spirituality in the Workplace**

3 credit hours

**Prerequisite:** 30 credit hours including 3 hours RELS at the 1000 level and 3 hours RELS at the 2000 level

Through case studies in the literature, and guest lecturers engaging in practices that support spirituality in the workplace, students will make the connection between the theory and practical developments in real workplaces. Class seminars will explore need for spirituality in the workplace, corporate responses to that need, and the external influences shaping the future of work. Guest lecturers will contribute first-hand experience of the challenges and dilemmas facing business leaders, managers and employees seeking ways to "bring their whole selves to work." Transformative learning exercises will enable students to explore their own responses to challenges and dilemmas around spirituality in the workplace.

**RELS 3337 South Asian Religions and the Arts**

3 credit hours

**Prerequisite:** 30 credit hours including 3 hours RELS at the 1000 level and 3 hours RELS at the 2000 level

The arts have been an important mode of expression of religious ideas and ideals in historical and contemporary South Asia and the diaspora. Students examine visual arts, architecture, music and performance traditions that are associated with the religious traditions of the region.

**RELS 3348 Ecological Crisis: Religious Perspectives**

3 credit hours

**Prerequisite:** 30 credit hours including 3 hours RELS at the 1000 level and 3 hours RELS at the 2000 level

Students examine the religious ecologies from around the world and draw on voices from different communities and practitioners to explore their perspectives on contemporary environmental issues. Topics may include Indigenous ecological knowledge, ecofeminism, environmental racism and eco-justice, displacement, gender and power.

**RELS 3349 Science and Religion**

3 credit hours

**Prerequisite:** 30 credit hours including 3 hours RELS at the 1000 level and 3 hours RELS at the 2000 level

In this course we will explore the relationship between science and religion. In the past this relationship was defined mainly by difference, difference in method, understanding of knowledge and language. Because of contemporary crises such as poverty and oppression worldwide and ecological crisis, religion and science are finding new reasons to cooperate. Religious issues involved in this cooperation such as women's critique, new religious movements and environmental concerns will be examined in this course.

**RELS 3351 Field Research Methods**

3 credit hours

**Prerequisite:** Religious Studies or Anthropology Major or Honours, or Religious Studies Concentration with the permission of the instructor.

Students are provided with the appropriate qualitative tools for conducting field-based research. Students develop a research project through various stages. Emphasis is placed on project planning, research ethics, participant observation, interviewing, note-taking, and writing.

**RELS 3354 Indigenous Peoples, Religion, Spirituality and Social Justice**

3 credit hours

**Prerequisite:** 30 credit hours including 3 hours RELS at the 1000 level and 3 hours RELS at the 2000 level

Students are introduced to religious, and spiritual traditions of Indigenous peoples in the Atlantic region and beyond. Students learn about connections between religion, spirituality, decolonization, and social justice for Indigenous people. Topics could include colonization, gender and sexuality, environment, education, land rights, policing, and the history of academic study of Indigenous cultures.

**RELS 3356 Religions in Film**

3 credit hours

**Prerequisite:** 30 credit hours including 3 hours RELS at the 1000 level and 3 hours RELS at the 2000 level

Feature films and documentaries about religions and religious issues have proliferated in recent years. This course will examine a variety of topics which may include: how selected religious traditions such as Buddhism, Judaism, Hinduism, Christianity and Islam are presented in films; how films depict religious symbols and religious life, how religious and ethical issues are presented in the film narratives and documentary discussions.

**RELS 3359 Buddhist Paths**

3 credit hours

**Prerequisite:** 30 credit hours including 3 credit hours RELS at the 1000 level and 3 credit hours RELS at the 2000 level

The history of Buddhism has seen the development of multiple schools and sects that each practice Buddhism in a different way. Students explore this variety, looking at contemporary Theravada, Mahayana and Vajrayana practices in Asia and the West.

**RELS 3360 Engaged Buddhism**

3 credit hours

**Prerequisite:** RELS 2327 or 3359

Students examine the development of Engaged Buddhism in the modern period. Engaged Buddhism came about as a critique against the view that Buddhism was something practiced by monks, in monasteries, and focused on what happened after death. Engaged Buddhists have instead proposed that Buddhism should be involved with transforming this world, leading to social, political and environmental activism.

**RELS 3373 Islam in South Asia**

3 credit hours

**Prerequisite:** 24 credit hours

A third of the entire Muslim population of the world lives in South Asia. Students will learn about the arrival of Islam in South Asia, its evolution and current manifestations in a sampling of its political, spiritual and social varieties.

**RELS 3374 Islam in North America since 9/11**

3 credit hours

**Prerequisite:** 24 credit hours

This course is a multifaceted look at issues of gender, law, and identity in North American Islam since September 11th 2001. This event and a subsequent culture of securitization marks a fundamental shift in the way that Islam is represented, and we will explore how Muslims in North America construct their identities and practice their religion.

**RELS 3826 Special Topics in Religious Studies**

3 credit hours

**RELS 3876 Directed Readings in Religious Studies**

3 credit hours

**Prerequisite:** Declared major, concentration, or minor in Religious Studies

Directed Reading courses permit students to pursue independent research topics which are not part of the normal curriculum. Students must apply to department faculty to enroll in a directed reading course.

**RELS 4000 Honours Thesis Research RELS**

3 credit hours

**Prerequisite:** Declared in the Honours degree program in Religious Studies

Under the supervision of faculty in religious studies, students will develop and honours thesis topic and complete the research for an honours thesis. Normally students will present their topic and research findings in a departmental seminar.

**RELS 4001 Honours Thesis Writing RELS**

3 credit hours

**Prerequisite:** Declared in the Honours degree program in Religious Studies

Under the supervision of faculty in religious studies, students will write an honours thesis based on the topic and research completed in RELS 4000. Evaluation of the thesis will be by all faculty in religious studies.

**RELS 4100 Religion and International Development**

3 credit hours

**Prerequisite:** Declared Major or Honours in Religious Studies or International Development Studies and completion of a minimum of 60 credit hours of university courses, or permission of instructor

This course explores the role of religions in development. Historical, theoretical and practical dimensions are studied under such topics as: religion and colonialism, religion and social capital in developing countries, the manner of presence of religions in developing societies, religion based NGOs, engaged religion, indigenous religions today, and the increase of evangelical and fundamentalist religions in the developing world. The course requires a high level of seminar participation and research.

**RELS 4150 Religion and Globalization**

3 credit hours

**Prerequisite:** 24 credit hours

Technology has allowed for unprecedented movements of people and information resulting in profound changes in the way religious traditions are practiced. Students explore some of the key themes in the study of globalization of religions, like diaspora and transnationalism, in order to understand how globalization has affected the way traditions are practiced how they are understood.

**RELS 4200 Postcolonialism and Religion**

3 credit hours

**Prerequisite:** Declared Major or Honours in Religious Studies and completion of a minimum of 60 credit hours of university courses or permission of the instructor

What is postcolonialism and how does it apply to the study of religion? When European and North American powers colonized a majority of the globe, they brought with them particular ways of defining legitimate religious behavior. Students explore ways in which these definitions continue to shape and challenge the ways we understand religion after colonialism.

**RELS 4333 Religion Race & Gender**

3 credit hours

**Prerequisite:** Declared Major or Honours in Religious Studies and completion of a minimum of 60 credit hours of university courses or permission of the instructor

Students consider race, gender, religion and spirituality both as socially constructed, historically situated categories, and as intersecting, embodied human experiences. Students apply critical race and feminist theory to examine histories of colonialism, displacement, migration and resistance.

**RELS 4387 Religious Pluralism**

3 credit hours

**Prerequisite:** Declared Major or Honours in Religious Studies and completion of a minimum of 60 credit hours of university courses, or permission of instructor

In Canada and in countries around the world, interpreters' religious pluralism frequently situates their analysis of religion within social theories about secularism, pluralism, globalization, multiculturalism and human rights. This course will examine those theories and their impact on the social location of religions and religious diversity in multicultural societies.

**RELS 4389 Religion and Public Life**

3 credit hours

**Prerequisite:** Fourth year, honours, or graduate student in RELS or related field

A pressing question in Western democracies is the place of religion in public life. Students examine the historical presence of religion in public life and the ways in which its presence is manifest in the modern west and the questions/controversies that this presence elicits.

**RELS 4390 Religion and Society in Atlantic Canada**

3 credit hours

**Prerequisite:** Declared Major or Honours in Religious Studies and completion of a minimum of 60 credit hours of university courses or permission of the instructor

An historical examination of the relationship between religion and society in Atlantic Canada from the beginning of European settlement to the present. Themes to be considered include religion and the formation of regional/ethnic identities, religion and politics, religion and movements of social reform, and the impact of secularization on Atlantic Canadian society. Topics will be examined in the broader context of Canadian history and the evolution of the trans-Atlantic world.

**RELS 4481 Theories and Methods in the Study of Religions**

3 credit hours

**Prerequisite:** Declared Major or Honours in Religious Studies and completion of 42 credit hours of university courses.

The study of religious traditions includes detailed studies of specific religions, their historical development, and cultural expressions. It includes the study of sacred texts, philosophies, theologies, rituals, sacred images and spaces, and the broad cultural significance of the religious in relation to other aspects of culture. Such multi-cultural and cross-cultural studies began in the nineteenth century and have employed diverse methodologies and theories about how best to study religions. This course will examine the history of the study of religions and review selectively the contemporary debates about the various strategies for the study of religions.

**RELS 4500 Religions & Orientalism**

3 credit hours

**Prerequisite:** Declared Major or Honours in Religious Studies and completion of a minimum of 60 credit hours of university courses, or permission of instructor.

The course will explore Orientalist representations of religious traditions as an objective "other". Special focus will be given to the ways in which scholars in the humanities, religious writers, and the interpreters of sacred texts contribute to the formation of various forms of Orientalism.

**RELS 4590 Honours Seminars in Religious Studies**

6 credit hours

**Prerequisite:** fourth-year honours status and permission of Department

The three general areas in which the Department offers courses are noted below, together with the courses which fall into each area. Since this is only a partial list, please consult the undergraduate advisor for updates and further clarifications.

**RELS 4826 Special Topics in Religious Studies**

3 credit hours

These courses will investigate in depth a specific topic or set of topics in Religious Studies. The topic will vary from year to year.

**RELS 4850 Directed Readings in Religious Studies**

6 credit hours

**Prerequisite:** permission of Department.

These courses are organized by individual faculty members in agreement with the Department as a whole; they are designed to supplement or provide an alternative to regular courses in Religious Studies according to the special needs and interests of students. Course content can be proposed by the student.

**RELS 4876 Directed Readings in Religious Studies**

3 credit hours

**Prerequisite:** permission of Department

These courses are organized by individual faculty members in agreement with the Department as a whole; they are designed to supplement or provide an alternative to regular courses in Religious Studies according to the special needs and interests of students. Course content can be proposed by the student.