



Texas State University
Religious Studies Course Descriptions

Spring 2020

If you have questions or concerns regarding the minor in Religious Studies program, please contact:

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World Religions
REL 1300.252 CRN# 32496
MW 11 – 12:20 PM, TBA room

Instructor: Binita Metha, Ph.D.
Description: This course offers an introduction to the major religions of the world. On the basis of primary foundational texts and secondary scholarly literature, the course will provide an overview of the historical development of these religious traditions and will examine the core ideas and concepts, myths, symbols and practices within a tradition. The lectures will also include a discussion of religious expression in arts, music and culture. Images and video clips on various aspects of religion will be shown as an integral part of the course material.

The course will enhance the ability of students to read the texts critically and refine their skills in analytical writing. Engagement with different religious traditions will serve to facilitate a multi-dimensional perspective on religious issues and on various facets of human existence in the world. The course will also provide tools to students to reflect comparatively on the similarities and differences between different traditions.
Required Textbooks: All the readings must be accessed from the TRACS site.

World Religions
REL 1300.253 CRN# 34635
TR 12:30 – 1:50 PM, Comal 114

Instructor: Natasha Mikles, Ph.D.
Description: Studying religious traditions—both your own and those of others—is some of the most important work you will do in your college career. To be an educated citizen, it is imperative that we both understand the basics of a variety of religious traditions and appreciate the vast diversity within a religious tradition. In this course, we’ll cover a sampling of eight religious traditions that have had a profound impact on the world with two goals in mind: developing our own religious literacy and learning how to think about religions critically and with nuance. Beyond learning the basic practices and beliefs of these religions, we’ll also ask what can we learned by comparing religions to each other? Are religions actually “all the same,” or do differences between them matter? Who even gets to define what is and is not a religion?
Required Textbooks: ISBN-13: 978-0061571282

World Religions
REL 1300.256 CRN# 36203
TR 11 – 12:20 PM, Comal 103

Instructor: Natasha Mikles, Ph.D.
Description: Studying religious traditions—both your own and those of others—is some of the most important work you will do in your college career. To be an educated citizen, it is imperative that we both understand the basics of a variety of religious traditions and appreciate the vast diversity within a religious tradition. In this course, we’ll cover a sampling of eight religious traditions that have had a profound impact on the world with two goals in mind: developing our own religious literacy and learning how to think about religions critically and with nuance. Beyond learning the basic practices and beliefs of these religions, we’ll also ask what can we learned by comparing religions to each other? Are religions actually “all the same,” or do differences between them matter? Who even gets to define what is and is not a religion?
Required Textbooks: ISBN-13: 978-0061571282

Founders, Prophets, and Saints
REL 2321 CRN# 35473
TR 11 – 12:20 PM, Comal 114

Instructor: Joe Laycock, Ph.D.
Description: Throughout history, extraordinary men and women have appeared to reveal sacred truths, model values to others, and deliver warnings about the future. Some of these people are dismissed as lunatics and frauds. Others go on to become prophets, founders, and saints and their ideas change the course of history. In this course, we will explore the lives of extraordinary men and women from the Jewish, Christian, Muslim, Buddhist, and Hindu traditions. We will also use the tools of psychology and sociology to examine their experiences and the influence they have on society.
Required Textbooks:

• Andrew Quintman/Gtsan-symon Heruka, The Life of Milarepa. Penguin Books, 2010.

• E. Allison Peers/ Teresa of Avila, The Interior Castle. Dover Publications, 2007.

• Karen Armstrong, Muhammad, A Prophet for Our Time. HarperCollins, 2006.

Mediterranean and European Religions
REL 2350 CRN# 38897
MW 2 – 3:20 PM, Comal 114

Instructor: Rebecca Raphael, Ph.D.
Description: Tired of dividing religions up into monotheism and polytheism? Curious about the commonalities and differences among the religions of the ancient Near East, ancient Mediterranean, and old Europe? This course surveys key literature, rituals, and community forms from Gilgamesh to the Eddas. We move geographically from the Near East, through the Mediterranean, and to northern Europe, integrating the emergence of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam within the cultural context of they polytheisms from which they differentiated themselves. This course focuses on the ancient to medieval periods.
Required Textbooks: TBA

Judaism
REL 3320 CRN# 38898
MW 11 – 12:20 PM, Comal 103

Instructor: Rebecca Raphael, Ph.D.
Description: This course takes the contemporary practice of Judaism in its geographical variety as the framework for an exploration of Jewish practices, texts, communities, and ideas across the religion's history. Learn about Judaism conceives of divinity, ethics, and practical dimensions of life.
Required Textbooks: TBA

Religious Controversy in America
REL 3330 CRN# 34636
TR 2 - 3:20 PM, Comal 114

Instructor: Joe Laycock, Ph.D.
Description: American culture has always been shaped by controversies over religion manifesting in culture wars, legal battles, and religious violence. These controversies point to unique aspects of the American experiment: How does religion shape the way Americans think about themselves as a people? How should “the will of the people” be balanced against the rights of minorities? How should Americans respond to religious groups we find frightening or dangerous? Perhaps more than ever, Americans are reminded daily of these arguments. This course will prepare students to think critically about these controversies and locate them within a historical context.
Required Textbooks: No textbooks required

Mythology and Cosmology
REL 3370 CRN# 36205
MW 12:30 – 1:50 PM, Comal 114

Instructor: Natasha Mikles, Ph.D.
Description:In this course, we will explore the concept of “hell” form a variety of angles within a variety of religious traditions, beginning by developing a working definition of “hell.” We will continually reexamine, scrutinize, and revise our definition as we examine the portrayal of “hell” in religious traditions as diverse as second-century Persian Zoroastrianism, seventh-century Chinese Buddhism, and nineteenth-century American Protestantism. By the end of the course, we will have built together an understanding of the variety of ways “hell” is used in religious, literary, and social discourse around the world, as well as the incredible diversity hidden within the singular concept of “hell.”
Required Textbooks:

* ISBN-13: 978-0190662042
* ISBN-13: 978-0143131625

Principles of Yoga
REL 3386 CRN# 38954
TR 9:30 – 10:50 AM, room TBA

Instructor: Binita Metha, Ph.D.
Description: This course is an in-depth study of the principles that underlie the practice of yoga. We explore the yogic conception of the mind and the body and analyze how it relates to psychoanalytic and neuroscientific frameworks. We also examine the parallels between the discipline of yoga and practices in other religious traditions, especially Christian, Islamic and Daoist.

Yoga is gaining attention in North America and other parts of the world. This course will allow students to understand the religious source of the various forms of yoga that have become pervasive in contemporary society. Yoga constitutes a very important aspect of Hindu religious traditions. Hence, the course will serve to broaden students’ knowledge about Indian religions.

This course is also suitable for philosophy majors or those with an interest in philosophy, since it will address problems concerning philosophy of mind and philosophy of religion and will familiarize them with the Eastern perspective on these topics.

Required Textbooks:

* Raphael, trans. and notes. 2012. *The Regal Way to Realization (Yogadarśana)*. New York: Aurea Vidya.
* Over and above the text, there will be other class readings, which students will access from the TRACS site.