AVAILABLE
RLG COURSES
2022-2023

*Courses with availability as of August 12, 2022. If you have any questions, please contact the Undergraduate Assistant, Phoebe, at religion.undergrad@utoronto.ca.
Courses by Content:

Indigenous Spiritualities and Religions
  Judaism
  Christianity
  Islam
  Hinduism
  Buddhism

100-Level Courses
  Philosophy of Religion
  Languages

Capstone Courses
  Exploring Varieties of Religious Expression
Indigenous Spiritualities and Religions

RLG201H1F: Indigenous Spiritualities and Religions
Professor Kevin White and Sarina Simmons | Fall – Tuesdays 1pm-3pm, with tutorials
This course explores the juxtaposition of Indigenous Philosophies (ways of being and becoming; relationships to land, time, and space; storytelling and orality) and Christian ideologies and framing of Indigenous Spiritualities as a justification for colonization in North America. From this course we will have fruitful discussions and reflections that we may interrogate the issues and power dynamics involve and think about how this, in turn, might help us chart future conversations on indigenous spiritualities and religions.

Judaism

RLG202H1S: Judaism
Professor Bob Gibbs | Winter – Mondays 2pm-4pm and Wednesdays 2pm-3pm
An introduction to the religious tradition of the Jews that explores key themes as they change from ancient times to today. The set of themes will include: the Sabbath, Study, Place, Household, Power. Each year will focus on one theme. We will read holy texts, modern literature, history, ethnography, and philosophy, covering each theme in a range of genres and across the diverse span of Jewish experience. Check out Professor Gibbs’s interview about the course.

RLG341H1F: Dreaming of Zion: Exile and Return in Jewish Thought
Professor Kenneth Green | Fall – Wednesdays 10am-12pm
Did you ever wonder how the Jewish people have managed to survive for 4000 years, despite enduring a long history of persecution, hatred, and oppression? This has been a question that has sorely perplexed people throughout the ages—including the Jews themselves. In this course, we will attempt to untangle the mystery of Jewish survival, and how it may have enabled that tiny people and faith to re-establish itself in its ancestral homeland, after two thousand years of exile and dispersion.

RLG342H1F: Judaism in the Early Modern Era
Professor Kenneth Green | Fall – Wednesdays 2pm-4pm
People often ask: How did Judaism suddenly transition from being an ancient faith and come to be a modern and multi-faceted religion? Much of the change can be attributed to the emergence of critical Jewish thinkers, beginning with Spinoza in 17th-century Holland, who started radically questioning tradition and who began a process of dramatic transformation. We will attempt to retrace the path of those pivotal thinkers who set a new course in Jewish life, and consider how this ancient tradition becomes a modern faith, with the enormous challenges that have gone along with it.

RLG346H1F: Time and Place in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam
Professor Harry Fox | Fall – Thursdays 10am-12pm
Judaism, Christianity, and Islam each have their own sets of prayer times, frequency of prayers and their locations such as home, synagogue, temple, church or mosque. They have completely different calendrical systems. Holiness is also connected to geographical locations, which often serve as destinations of pilgrimage. This course will examine linear and cyclical times and the concepts of holiness in time and place by looking at primary sources in translation. We will investigate the persistence of holy places, how their names continue, and how gender issues are part of the jurisdictional politics of disputes over place and time.
We, Katie Maguire and John Marshall, are excited to be teaching this course this fall because the diversity of materials, contexts, and expressions of Christianity over the past millennia enables us to see the complexity of religion as a human cultural phenomenon. We will do our best to range inclusively across demography, geography, and ideology, to combine critical and sympathetic analyses, and to bring to life some very diverse forms of Christianity. We are in the process of completely redesigning the course together and are eager to explore Christianity from the perspective of the academic study of religion with you, the University of Toronto’s excellent undergraduates.

This course will focus on the use, influence, and impact of biblical interpretation in the United States of America. We will uncover how texts are repurposed, corralled, and coerced into addressing various issues, including governance, enslavement, war, and poverty. No prior knowledge of biblical texts is required.

For thousands of years, the Hebrew Bible (sometimes called the Old Testament) has influenced ideas about disability in societies across the globe. Yet, notions of disability in the Hebrew Bible may be strikingly different from what we might imagine. This course explores how some biblical texts and related ancient literature conceptualize disability in relation to issues of ethnicity, sexuality, beauty, age, social class, religious expression and so on. All readings will be in English. No knowledge of Hebrew is required.

This course introduces a very important figure in the history of Christianity. Many consider Paul as the inventor of Christianity; many others view him as a misogynist and the source of all the problems with this religious tradition. Come to this exciting class to form a clear understanding of who Paul was.
Islam

RLG350H1F: The Life of Muhammad
Professor Walid Saleh | Fall – Wednesdays 6pm-8pm
This course introduces students to the various ways we study religious founders and their impact on a tradition. The course is divided into major parts - the first introduces students to the modern historical studies on the historical life of Muhammad. The second part is a study of Muhammad as the Prophet of Islam and how Muslims across the generations understood his career and message.

RLG481H1S: Islamic Intellectual Tradition
Dr. Seyfeddin Kara | Winter – Wednesdays 3pm-5pm
Contrary to widely held misconceptions that Islam conflicts with science and knowledge, Islam has dramatically contributed to advancing knowledge and learning. Since its advent, Islam has attached great importance to education and the transmission of knowledge through many religious and scientific institutions. While challenging existing misconceptions about Islam's intellectual contribution, this course will engage some fundamental classical Muslim thinkers who have shaped the Islamic intellectual tradition. Based on the study of their works, the course will answer questions: Is Islam compatible with philosophy? Why did Gazali not like philosophers? How did Averroes incorporate Greek thought into the Muslim world? What are the boundaries of theological tolerance in Islam?

Hinduism

RLG205H1F: Hinduism
Professor Arti Dhand | Fall – Mondays 12pm-2pm
This course explores themes relating to the religion of Hindus, called Hinduism since modernity. Topics include the canonical literatures, philosophies, and doctrines of Hinduism, along with the debates surrounding them; lived Hinduism, and the texts that inform its practice and experience; activities considered quintessential to Hinduism, such as temple visits, yoga, and venerating a guru; and the vibrant spectrum of Hindu expression one encounters in the diaspora. The course will equip students with fluency in core concepts and practices of Hinduism, as well as an understanding of Hindu history as one of dynamism and transformation.

RLG362H1F: Rama of Ayodhya: From Literature to Politics
Professor Arti Dhand | Fall – Wednesdays 12pm-2pm
A study of the figure of Rama, from his genesis in the Valmiki Ramayana, to his historical evolution as a cultural and political icon through medieval and modern India.

RLG476H1F: Caste and “Its Other”
Professor Srilata Raman and Stephanie Duclos-King | Fall – Tuesdays 10am-12pm
Caste has recently entered the North American lexicon through social justice campaigns such as BLM, but it has a long history for South Asian communities around the world. We are looking forward to introducing and entering the debates around issues such as, why are discussions of caste linked to ‘Hindu-phobic’ sentiment, for instance with the recent cancellation of Google’s planned caste workshops? How does caste link to social justice issues in India and the diaspora? How is there simultaneously a silence around caste and an academic legacy of equating caste with Indian identity? Please join us as we tackle these issues, engaging with a variety of academic and non-academic works.
Buddhism

JNR301H1F: The History of Buddhist Meditation
Dr. Michael Ium | Fall – Mondays 10am-12pm (online)
The history of Buddhist meditation is one of both transformative praxis and vociferous debate. In this course, students will become acquainted with both aspects, as we consider questions such as: is philosophical study a prerequisite for meditation? Are sex and alcohol conducive or detrimental to one’s practice? Is meditative attainment the result of one’s own effort or the blessing of external deities?

RLG371H1S: Interdependence
Dr. Eleanor Pontoriero | Winter – Mondays 12pm-2pm
This year, we will explore socially engaged Buddhist ethics and practice from Theravada and Mahayana perspectives. Our theme is interdependence – how this ethic informs, and manifests in socially engaged Buddhist approaches to human rights, peacebuilding, racial, gender, and environmental justice and inter- and intra- faith dialogue. Our focus will be contemporary, intersectional, and diverse.

RLG373H1S: Buddhist Ritual
Professor Amanda Goodman | Winter – Wednesdays 11am-1pm
In this course, we will certainly do some thinking about Dunhuang and its medieval Buddhist practice communities. We will consider the structure, scope, and significance of Buddhist rituals – monastic and lay ordinations, initiations and life-cycle rituals, meditation practice, pilgrimage, healing rites – across Buddhist communities, past and present. Relying on written sources, ethnographic accounts, audio-visual sources, and material artifacts, we will consider ritual as both text and event, and draw on theoretically informed scholarship to critically explore the utility of “ritual” as a cross-cultural category.

RLG463H1S: Tibetan Buddhism
Professor Rory Lindsay | Winter – Mondays 2pm-4pm
Building on a course I taught at the University of California Santa Barbara, this seminar will provide an introduction to the history of Buddhism in Tibet and examine specific themes including ritual violence in Tibetan historical contexts and Tibetan approaches to dying. We will also examine the history of the Bön religious tradition and Tibetan Islam.

100-Level Courses

RLG102H1F: Blood, Sex and Drugs
Rosalind Cooper | Fall – Wednesdays 12pm-2pm, with tutorials
We will be using the blogging and social media platforms blogger, Tumblr and twitter as we explore how violence, desire and intoxication illuminate the human condition and the study of religion. For more information, please see the course blog (still under construction!) or feel free to contact me!

RLG104H1F: Conspiracies, Social Media and the Rise of New Religious Movements
Professor Jennifer Harris | Fall – Tuesdays 10am-12pm, with tutorials
In this course, we examine the intersection of the three named elements in our title: conspiracies (mostly conspiracy theories and theorists), social media (in particular, TikTok and Instagram), and what we in the academy call "new religious movements" or NRMs, which are commonly called "cults." Visit this course website for an introductory video.
Philosophy of Religion

RLG209H1S: Justifying Religious Belief
Professor Sol Goldberg | Winter – Fridays 12pm-2pm, with tutorials
If you were to ask for the academic rationale of this course, I’d say that it first explores and evaluates some basic challenges to religious belief by modern atheistic philosophers, and then assesses some strategies which religiously inclined philosophers have developed in response. But, to me, the course is really an attempt to sort out what we owe each other given that we rely on other members of our society for all kinds of information and ideas. Can we count on our fellows to share beliefs and opinions that have been formed responsibly? It’s a serious question, but the course is also great fun!

RLG332H1S: Reasonable and Radical Hope
Professor Sol Goldberg | Winter – Tuesdays 2pm-4pm
This course is, to me, the flipside of RLG303 (Evil and Suffering). But whether or not you are interested in human beings at their worst (moral evil) or their most unfortunate (natural evil), you might want to think about the resources which humans have to respond to those disturbing possibilities of our existence; that is, you might want to understand also why people may, and how they can, hope despite malevolence and misfortune. This course is designed to tackle those important questions.

RLG383H1S: Interpretation and Dialogue
Professor Sol Goldberg | Winter – Thursdays 10am-12pm
This course is motivated by a question as much existential as theoretical: how, if at all, can we understand people whose backgrounds, values, orientations, etc. make them profoundly different from us? This question occupies historians, anthropologists, and ethnographers of religion in their professional capacity; but, with growing divisions within and between societies, it is a question which should interest all of us. This course is a good chance to explore it.

RLG418H1F: Advanced Topics in the Philosophical Study of Religion – Shame and Humiliation
Professor Sol Goldberg | Fall – Mondays 2pm-4pm
This seminar will try to understand shame’s ambiguous place in our moral lives (shame’s potential to motivate us to be better versions of ourselves versus its potential to cripple our sense of moral worth). It moreover considers shame’s ambiguous potential in the light of a thesis – Nietzsche’s – about the Greek versus Christian backgrounds of our current understanding of morality. I’d encourage especially students interested in religious ethics, psychology of religion, or the history of moral ideas to consider the seminar. But anyone who has noticed that public shaming has grown more common recently might also find lots of food for thought here.

Languages

RLG234H1S: Language and Religion
Professor Libbie Mills and Anne-Marie Fowler | Winter – Tuesdays 4pm-6pm, with tutorials
Can religion be construed outside of the realm of human language?
Can artificial agents engage in it?
What do our reactions to these questions tell us?
Join Anne-Marie and Libbie in thinking through the interoperation of language and religion in this all-new course.
RLG264H1F & RLG265H1S: Introductory Pali I & II  
Professor Libbie Mills | Fall/Winter - Mondays 4pm-5pm & Wednesdays 3pm-5pm  
The DSR Pali classes are a peaceful home in which to learn about Buddhism through the direct and lively texts of Pali, one of Buddhism’s earliest languages.

RLG377H1F: Intermediate Tibetan I  
Professor Rory Lindsay | Fall – Tuesdays 3pm-5pm & Thursdays 4pm-5pm  
I’m excited to be teaching intermediate Tibetan again, a course which is open to anyone with a basic knowledge of classical Tibetan language. This fall we will examine short Buddhist canonical passages on death and dying and a famous chapter on the birth of Tibet’s most famous saint Milarepa.

Capstone Courses

RLG404H1S: Departmental Capstone – Research  
Tamara Cohen | Winter – Wednesdays 10am-12pm  
In this course we will think about why research at a university matters, its purpose and function, and we will learn strategies for how to approach a research project. A capstone course is meant to be the culmination of your studies at the university, and it is an opportunity for you to put what you’ve learned to use and write about a topic relevant to the Study of Religion that is of interest to you.

RLG405H1F: Departmental Capstone – Practical  
Dr. David Perley | Fall – Wednesdays 1pm-3pm  
This course is a perfect opportunity for Religion Majors and Specialists to meet each other and work together during their culminating years. In past years students enrolled come from diverse research backgrounds which leads to opportunities for students to inform each other about alternative approaches to the study of religion. Students will have the opportunity to collaborate on presenting themes related to the intersection of religion and various public spheres. Students will also share insights from their individual research projects with the rest of the group. In our current global, political climate it is more apparent than ever that the convenient, abstract separation of ‘religious’ from ‘secular’ elements of life is completely inadequate to understand the world around us. A core question we work on is: how can academics inform public spheres about the complexities of religious worldviews and ideologies, especially as these worldviews impact policies, laws, and cultural practices that go far beyond the abstract idea of a separate ‘religious sphere’?

RLG426H1S: Religion in the Public Sphere – Community-Engaged Learning  
Professor Laura Beth Bugg | Winter – Thursdays 10am-12pm  
This course is a fantastic opportunity to gain experience working at a community organization and to reflect upon the ways that religion and religious diversity shape public life. Interested students must complete the online application form to indicate their interest in and expectations of community-engaged learning by the end of November. Interviews will be completed by December.
Exploring Varieties of Religious Expression

RLG200H1F: The Study of Religion
Professor Sol Goldberg | Fall – Fridays 12pm-2pm, with tutorials
This course introduces students to religious studies as an interdisciplinary field of inquiry, a field that continues to draw on the theoretical foundations of various disciplines (philology, sociology, psychology, anthropology) and concepts central to several other areas of study (race studies, gender studies, post-colonial studies, media studies). To understand better the various, ongoing research programs that make up the study of religion today, we’ll look at several figures whose ideas forged pathways which later scholars continue to travel.

RLG230H1F: Religion, Law and Society
Dr. Ari Schriber | Fall – Wednesdays 3pm-5pm, with tutorials
The role of religion in state law is a perennial source of contention across the globe. From the right to wear religious garments in public to constitutional commitments to a certain faith, such debates continuously reshape the notions of state and religion as we know them. However, these debates also have deep histories that revolve around foundational questions: What makes certain states "secular"? Who gets to determine what constitutes the "religious" from the secular? And what is so "modern" about modern secular law in the first place? In this course, we will develop the tools to critically address such questions and understand how they are continuously negotiated in practice. We will pay attention to the particularities of religion and state as they have emerged since the nineteenth century before turning to case studies from both Western Christian-majority and non-Western Muslim-majority contexts. In comparing these cases, we will discover how modern states differ significantly in their approaches to legislating and adjudicating religion in law.

RLG232H1F: Religion and Film
Professor Sarah Gallant | Fall – Wednesdays 10am-12pm
I am excited to explore several new Fantasy and Sci Fi films in the course this term, including Pixar's Turing Red (2022)!

RLG211H1S: Psychology of Religion
Professor Marsha Hewitt and Filip Andjelkovic | Winter – Thursdays 11am-1pm, with tutorials
Where do the gods, deities, spirits, demons and angels dwell? Do they have an independent existence "out there", or do they dwell in the deep recesses of the human mind as unconscious images and fantasies that are expressed in culturally patterned idioms? Where are the boundaries between the created and the given? While there are no absolute answers to these questions that lie at the heart of religious experiences, this course will explore the ways in which the human mind navigates and regulates internal fantasies and external demands.

RLG313H1F: Love, Sex, Family
Allison Murphy | Fall – Fridays 10am-12pm
This course provides an opportunity to more deeply understand and critically reflect upon some of the most basic elements of our lives: love, sex, and family. We will explore the religious and philosophical developments that continue to impact how we think about our relationships in modernity, emphasizing the contingency and constructedness of these notions, however natural they may seem.
RLG318H1F: Religion and Nature  
*Professor Alexander Hampton and Katarina Pejovic | Fall – Mondays 2pm-4pm*

There is a complex relationship between nature, religion and the aesthetic expression of human spirituality. Religion and Nature will explore this relationship across a range of periods, from the antique to the contemporary. Our journeys, both philosophical and literary, will take participants through a range of biomes— desert, countryside, forest, mountains, tundra—and explore how these texts can help to redefine our place both in nature and as part of it.

RLG335H1F: How Religions Spread: Networks and Religion  
*Professor John Kloppenborg | Fall – Wednesdays 1pm-3pm*

Social networks are critical in the maintenance and spread of religions. This course offers an introduction to network concepts and, focusing on ancient Mediterranean religions, examines how religious ideas diffuse; networks and the creation of social capital; intersections of religion and trade or business networks; and the collapse of networks.

RLG338H1S: Religion and Religiosity in Israel/Palestine  
*Professor Yigal Nizri | Winter – Thursdays, 4pm-6pm*

Focusing on Palestine/Israel, this course explores a wide range of theoretical questions about religion and nationalism, drawing from disciplines as diverse as history, theology, politics, ethnography, literature, cultural studies, and diaspora studies. Over the semester, we will address the history of the making of sacred spaces and sites from Jewish, Christian, and Muslim perspectives. Students are thus invited to analyze specific sites and rituals associated with religious congregations and ceremonial practices, and study them within their local, regional, and national contexts. Looking at the complex relationships between religious-political movements and institutions within predominantly Jewish and Muslim societies, we will also be delving into the various attempts to secularize (and theologize) Jewish and Palestinian communities and their discontents.

Rather than emphasize the Zionist-Palestinian conflict, this course is a journey into the history and present of the land and its diverse political communities. For example, we will examine cemeteries, shrines, synagogues, mosques, churches (and trees and caves) in the region as complex physical spaces. And yet, the course does not focus on a single religion but on what happens when one looks at the interactions between religions in that particular region. In other words, the themes and spatial questions are considered within their local and regional contexts. This approach invites students to think comparatively across apparently separate religious traditions, offering a fresh and much needed look at how the region has been produced, imagined, “scripturalized”, and memorialized.

RLG393H1S: Graphic Religion: Myth and the Spiritual in Graphic Novels  
*Dr. David Perley | Winter – Wednesdays 1pm-3pm*

This course explores the various ways religion and religious themes connect with graphic novels, comic books, and sequential art. We look at not only religion *in* comics, but also explore: the use of comic books as a form of religious pedagogy within particular traditions (e.g., Jack Chick tracts); comparisons between religious imaginaries and comic book myths and cosmologies (e.g., superhumans, multiverses, and alternate realities); alternative-independent graphic novels as a means to express marginalized experiences; and finally, an analysis of the power and effectiveness of a medium that is a complicated combination of word and image.