WHY STUDY RELIGION AT TUFTS?

To study religion in an academic setting is to learn how to think about religion from a critical vantage point. As a critical and comparative discipline, the study of religion provides a powerful set of tools for exploring other cultures and thinking about the world we live in. Students learn to ask pressing questions about the role religion plays in personal experience and human society; about the nature and origin of religion; and about the dynamic interplay among religion and other dimensions of human culture, from biology, sociology, and economy to psychology, politics, and gender.

The study of religion is central to a liberal arts education and provides excellent preparation for a wide range of careers from education, medicine, law, and the arts to social work, ministry, and foreign service. Through the critical study of religion students develop the kinds of critical thinking skills essential for responsible engagement in their community and the larger world. The study of religion is an ideal preparation for entrance into graduate programs in religious studies, theological studies, or seminary training.

The study of religion provides a wonderful complement to other majors and programs at Tufts such as History, Philosophy, Sociology, English and International Relations.

The Department of Religion at Tufts is dedicated to the exploration and critical analysis of religion as a central aspect of human history and culture. Courses seek to promote:

- Awareness of the diversity of religious experience around the globe and throughout history
- Empathetic engagement with the beliefs, texts, and practices of the world’s religions
- Mastery of a range of methods for studying religion
- Reflection on the role religion plays in shaping human customs, values, beliefs, and institutions.

Cover photo: Vodun devotees in Porto-Novo (Republic of Benin) eating kola nuts and pepper seeds as a communal sacrament, (© Elana Jefferson-Tatum)

Back photo: Animal Motif and Hanging Cloth on Vodun Shrine - Abomey, Benin, (CC BY-SA 2.0, Adam Jones)
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<tr>
<th>Course Code</th>
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<td>REL 01</td>
<td>Introduction to Religion</td>
<td>Joseph Walser</td>
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<tr>
<td>REL 10-01</td>
<td>Africana Sacred Matters</td>
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<td>REL 21</td>
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<td>REL 36</td>
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<td>Life After Death in Western History</td>
<td>Jennifer Eyl</td>
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<td>REL 99</td>
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<td>REL 106</td>
<td>Religion, Violence, &amp; Sexuality</td>
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<td>REL 145</td>
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<td>REL 154</td>
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<td>REL 192</td>
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**Courses Co-Listed with Religion**

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<td>REL 87</td>
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<td>Armenian Art, Architecture and Politics</td>
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<td>REL 194-07</td>
<td>Religion and Media</td>
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FACULTY

Brian Hatcher  Professor | Packard Chair of Theology | Chair
Eaton Hall, Room 314 | brian.hatcher@tufts.edu
Hinduism and Religion in Modern South Asia

Joseph Walser  | Associate Professor
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Buddhism and Religion in Ancient South Asia

Heather Curtis  | Associate Professor
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History of Christianity and American Religions

Kenneth Garden  | Associate Professor
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Islam and Sufism

Jennifer Eyl  | Assistant Professor
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Ancient Christianity and Religions of the Ancient World

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African Religious Cultures

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Christian Studies

Elizabeth Lemons  
Senior Lecturer
Eaton Hall, Room 316B | elizabeth.lemons@tufts.edu
Religion and Culture
REQUIREMENTS

The Religion Major

Ten courses distributed as follows:

Foundation Requirement
After taking two courses in the department, students must take REL 99 Theory and Method in the Study of Religion.

Diversity Requirement (four courses)
Students should have exposure to at least four different religious traditions. This may be accomplished through classes in which four different traditions are taught, or through four courses, each focused on a different religious tradition, or through some combination thereof. Students are to take four classes within the department to achieve the diversity requirement. The advisor and the chair of the Department of Religion must approve the courses taken to fulfill this requirement.

Depth Requirement (three courses)
Students must choose a subfield in religious studies. This may be one religious tradition, the traditions of a geographical region, or a religious textual tradition. Students must demonstrate that they have taken at least three classes in that specialty. One of the three courses must be in the doctrinal (theological and philosophical) aspects of religion. In their chosen areas of specialization, students must take two above-100 level courses. These may include an independent study or a senior thesis. The departmental advisor and the chair must approve the student’s area of specialization. No course may count for both the diversity and depth requirements.

Two Additional Courses
The two courses can be listed or cross-listed within the department.

The Religion Minor

Five courses distributed as follows:

Foundation Requirement
After taking two courses in the department, students must take REL 99 Theory and Method in the Study of Religion.

Diversity Requirement (three courses)
Students should have exposure to at least three different religious traditions. This may be accomplished through classes in which three different traditions are taught, or through three courses, each focused on a different religious tradition, or through some combination thereof. The advisor and the chair of the Department of Religion must approve the courses taken to fulfill this requirement.

Upper-division Requirement
One other course numbered above 100. This course may not be counted as one of the three courses of the above requirement.
REL 01      Introduction to Religion
Joseph Walser      1   T   9:00-11:30 AM

An introduction to the field of religion to give students an understanding of the basic elements of the subject. The focus will be on the various relationships between religion and political power. Through this lens, we will examine pivotal texts, doctrines and monuments in Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, Sikhism, Chinese Religions, Zoroastrianism, Shinto, Judaism, New Religious Movements, Christianity, Islam and Atheism/Secularism. This course counts toward the Humanities distribution requirement.

REL 10-01      Africana Sacred Matters
Elana Jefferson-Tatum      J+     TTh    3:00-4:15 PM
CLST: AFR 47-02

This course offers an introduction to African religions in Africa and the African Atlantic world with a focus on art and material culture. We will specifically explore West and Central African indigenous religions and material cultures with an attention to foundational elements of African religious thought, practice, and ethics. Additionally, in our examination of African Atlantic traditions, we will study the transformation and indigenization of these African religions in the Caribbean and the Americas. To this end, we will interrogate: How and why does matter matter in Africana religious worlds? How do Africana ritual objects, landscapes, art forms, and embodied practices convey moral systems, philosophies, and theologies? Moreover, how do Africana sacred and material expressions challenge the concept and construction of religion? In studying Africana religious and material cultures, we will, therefore, also interrogate relationships between religion and matter, the spiritual and the material, and the natural and the supernatural. This course counts toward the Humanities distribution requirement, the World Civilization requirement, and the African and African-American Culture and Region of Origin options.
We will study the Hebrew Bible to become familiar with the works of its individual authors, and to gain an understanding of the historical circumstances in which they wrote, as well as to survey the historical development of ancient Israel’s religious beliefs and institutions. Topics will include the life of Moses, the production of Israel’s codes of law, the construction of theological language and imagery, the rise of the monarchy and the temple, accounts of creation, psalms and wisdom literature, and the lives and legacies of the Israelite prophets. This course counts toward the Humanities distribution requirement and the Judaic Culture option.

This class will examine the development of Christianities from antiquity through the medieval period. We will encounter key Christian figures, texts, theological debates, and religious practices alongside political and historical events from Egypt, Nubia, China, Iraq, Syria, Turkey, and southern Europe. Central questions we will confront include, Who defines Christianity? Can we speak of Christianity in the singular? How do religious practices and beliefs become localized as they spread from region to region? This course counts toward the Humanities or Social Sciences distribution requirement.
REL 42  Religion and Politics in American History
Heather Curtis  E+ MW  10:30-11:45 AM
CLST: HIST 126, AMER 15

“In God we Trust,” “One Nation Under God,” “God Bless America”: phrases like these alert us to the on-going influence of religion in American public life. This course explores the role of religion in shaping American civic engagement and political activity from the 17th century to the present, aiming to put contemporary events in broader historical context. Key topics and themes include: the relationship between church and state in the colonial period; faith and the founders; religion and social activism in the antebellum era (especially anti-slavery and women’s rights); religion, race and civil rights; religious “outsiders” and American politics (particularly Mormons, Catholics, and Muslims); spirituality and social protest in the 20th century (pacifism; feminism; and economic reform); the rise of the religious right; religion and American politics post-9/11; and the recent presidential election. This course counts toward the Humanities or Social Sciences distribution requirement.

REL 44  Introduction to Hinduism
Brian Hatcher  I+ MW  3:00-4:15 PM

An overview of the Hindu religious tradition, combining historical and textual study with investigation of modern and contemporary themes. Includes attention to the expression and contestation of Hinduism in colonial, postcolonial and diasporic contexts. Promotes critical reflection on Hindu beliefs, social structures, popular customs, and rituals. This course counts toward the Humanities distribution requirement, the World Civilization requirement, and the South and Southeast Asian Culture option.
REL 70   Life After Death in Western History
Jennifer Eyl   K+   MW  4:30-5:45 PM

This course will examine the many ideas of heaven, hell, purgatory, and other post-mortem geographies, as they have developed throughout Western history. We will survey a range of texts, artifacts, and works of art from the ancient Mediterranean and Medieval Europe, to the Christian Reformation and early 21st century America. Among our historical readings, we will include theoretical questions regarding cognitive science and the imagining of invisible worlds, the socio-political uses of post-mortem damnation and/or reward, as well as the historical struggle to address human mortality. This course counts toward the Humanities requirement.

REL 99   Theory and Method in the Study of Religion
Elizabeth Lemons   D+   TTh  10:30-11:45 AM

Required course for Religion majors and minors.
Prerequisites: 2 other religion courses, or permission of instructor

This seminar aims to enhance students’ ability to discuss and analyze theoretical and methodological issues in the academic study of religion. We will explore selected important modern texts that raise enduring questions about such issues as the nature of religious phenomena, their purpose in societies, and their comparability across cultures. In addition, we will consider recent work by scholars of religion that critiques earlier perspectives and/or raises new issues. Discussion of case studies will facilitate assessment of the benefits and liabilities of various methodological and theoretical perspectives. Through analysis of significant approaches and issues, students will develop an understanding of their own perspectives in relation to the field of religious studies. This course counts toward the Humanities distribution requirement.
This course will analyze representative ethical and theological positions on current issues related to violence/nonviolence and sexuality in the U.S. We will look at the treatment of these issues in a variety of contemporary religious and secular traditions. Topics include responses to war, terrorism, structural oppressions (such as racism, sexism, classism, heterosexism), and sexual violence, as well as controversies around reproductive rights and same-sex marriage. This course counts towards the Humanities distribution requirement.

Survey of Tibetan Buddhism, as it is practiced in Western China, Mongolia and Siberia. Focus will be on two monastic specialties: philosophical/debate and ritual/yogic practice. We will explore issues of gender, economics, political power, and ethnic identity as they are related to tantric forms of Buddhism throughout the region. This course counts toward the Humanities distribution requirement, the World Civilization requirement, and the East Asian Culture & Diasporas and South & Southeast Asian Culture options.
REL 154  Muhammad and the Qu’ran  
Alnoor Dhanani  L+ TTh  4:30-5:45 PM

The Prophet Muhammad and the revelation of the Qur’an lie at the heart of historical and contemporary Islamic discourses. They have also entered into present-day national discourses where they are the subject of heated polemic. This course engages with several strands of these discourses: the examination of traditional and critical-historical accounts of the origins and formation of the Qur’an and its association with the historical Prophet Muhammad; the Qur’anic theme of salvation history through Abrahamic prophets and revelations; varieties of Qur’anic exegeses; contemporary Muslim discourses on jihād, gender and patriarchy, democracy and pluralism; and national conversations on the Qur’an and the Prophet Muhammad from the Founding Fathers to the present.