RELIGION MAJOR

MAJOR DESCRIPTION

The department offers four categories of courses through which students organize their curriculum of studies. Please note that some courses fit more than one category; check the "additional requirements and/or comments" section of the WesMaps listing for a course's official designation(s). None of our courses have prerequisites.

- RELI151. The purpose of this course is to introduce students to the academic study of religion. It is not designed to survey the religions of the world or present an overview of global religious diversity. Rather, it uses a series of empirical case studies to explore methodological and theoretical issues in the study of religion by examining (1) the various intellectual tools used in religious studies; (2) the social, political, economic, and cultural context of those tools; and (3) the debates arising from their use.
- **Historical Traditions courses.** Many courses in the department deal with the historical content of major religious traditions such as Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, and Judaism, as well as secular, shamanic, Afro-Caribbean, and classical and modern Chinese traditions. These courses examine the texts, histories, institutions, and rituals of these religions. In this category there are both survey courses (generally numbered at the **200-**level) and seminars (generally numbered at the **300-**level). In general, courses that are not thematic approach or method and theory courses are considered historical traditions courses.
- **Thematic Approach courses.** Thematic approach courses examine specific problems, questions, or themes that intersect with the study of religion. These include gender, race, politics, sex, law, science, and colonialism. Thematic approach courses may focus on one religious tradition or draw comparatively between traditions, but all are intended to provide tools for exploring and analyzing historical and contemporary phenomena.
- **Method and Theory courses.** These courses review and critically analyze methods, theories, and strategies employed by scholars of religion. Method and theory courses include the department's RELI398, which is required of all majors and to be taken in the junior year. The task of this course is to reflect upon the theoretical and methodological pluralism in the field of religious studies with the opportunity to apply these theories and methods to specific texts, concrete issues, or other cultural formations.

ADMISSION TO THE MAJOR

All majors are required to take RELI151. This introductory course is taught every semester. Majors are required to take it before the end of their junior year. It is strongly encouraged that students take RELI151 in their first two years at Wesleyan.

MAJOR REQUIREMENTS

To complete a major in religion, students are required to take a minimum of 11 courses (10.25 credits) (with a maximum of 15.25, including thesis credits), 8 of which must be numbered 201 or higher. Students may count no more than two courses originating outside the department (i.e. cross-listed from another department or from Study Abroad) towards the major.

The minimum of 11 courses (10.25 credits) will be distributed as follows:

- RELI151
- Four courses in three areas of historical traditions
- Two courses in thematic approaches
- Two courses in method and theory, one of which must be RELI398
- A tenth course, which may be taken in any of these areas. Alternatively, the student can include one Hebrew course (HEBR202 or higher) or a different fourth-semester language course with substantial religion content (see the Language section, under Additional Information).
- RELI404 (.25 credit), a capstone exploration of your work in the major to be taken during the spring of senior year.

Note: Although some courses may fit more than one category, they cannot be included more than once in the overall count of courses taken.

STUDENT LEARNING GOALS

Our students are trained in cross-cultural, interdisciplinary, and critical approaches to the study of religion. They are expected to understand the power and limits of these approaches to the study of religion, and to demonstrate the ability to analyze practices of interpretation, systems of belief, and patterns of religious behavior. Each student will develop critical reading, writing, and research skills, and apply these to topics in the history, philosophy, and ethnography of religious traditions, including the effects of religion in society; the imbrication of religion with science and secularism; and the ways religions can form collective identity through race, nationalism, gender and sexuality, class, caste, language, and migration. They will demonstrate these skills relative to various forms of religious phenomena such as myths, rituals, and texts.

STUDY ABROAD

The department enthusiastically encourages students to study abroad and will count up to two courses taken outside Wesleyan toward the major.

LANGUAGE REQUIREMENT

Religion majors are strongly encouraged to develop knowledge in an ancient and/or modern foreign language. One upper-level Hebrew course (**202** or higher) can count toward the major as a tenth course. Language courses besides Hebrew (such as Arabic, Sanskrit, etc.) can count toward the major once approved by the department chair. Such a course should be the equivalent of a fourth-semester language course, whose syllabus includes at least one-third religion content. For example, the course might look at religious writings, it might address some aspect of the role of religion or religious groups in society, or it might explore debates about religion, secularism, or modernity.

HONORS

Religion majors with a B+ (88.3) average in the department may choose to write a senior honors thesis. Candidates for honors must submit to the department chair a two- to three-page proposal abstract and bibliography by the last Friday of April of their junior year. The proposal should be a description of the intellectual problem of the thesis and the method to be used (whether it will be historical, ethnographic, etc.). Students should list three faculty members

who would make good thesis tutors, in order of preference. The department will determine which theses will move forward with which faculty and may reject some proposals. Students will be notified of the department's decision before classes end in May. A student must be general education stage 1-compliant by graduation to be awarded honors or high honors. A passing grade, honors, or high honors will be awarded after a student's work has been presented to a departmental colloquium.

In lieu of a traditional thesis, students with significant experience in a creative art form or medium may opt to pursue a creative thesis project. Such a project will consist of a combination of artistic production (music, art, theater, dance, film, etc.) and a written, substantive, analytic essay reflecting on the process and intention of the artistic production. The goal is to explore a religious studies question through artistic practice, while maintaining the analytic rigor expected of a more traditional written thesis. In order to be approved for a creative thesis project, a student must demonstrate significant coursework or other training in the creative medium chosen, and must have a thesis mentor in the relevant department, in addition to a thesis mentor in Religion. There is no expectation that the student must submit the thesis for credit in two departments, although double majors may choose to do so.

Creative thesis projects will go through the same approval process as traditional theses, are eligible for departmental honors, and are subject to the same deadlines. The student must find an advisor willing to supervise the artistic portion of the project before submitting their proposal to the Religion Department for approval. The project proposal should take the same format as that of a traditional thesis, as outlined above. The student will register for a variant of the thesis tutorial REL 409C/410C, which will list both the religion advisor and the creative advisor as instructors. If the student is submitting the project in both departments, they can opt to register for one thesis tutorial in Religion during one semester and another thesis tutorial in the secondary department during the other semester.

CAPSTONE EXPERIENCE

Assessment Portfolio and Capstone Symposium. During their time in the major, students will assemble a portfolio of three papers (at least four pages in length each) that they have written in the department: one from the introductory course (RELI151), one from the Major's Colloquium (RELI398), and a third of their choice that was written in their junior or senior year. Taken together, these papers should give evidence of the development of the students' learning, as well as their command of critical, analytical, and interpretative skills.

In the drop/add period of the spring term, all senior majors enroll in a .25 -credit pass/fail tutorial (RELI404), for which they will write a three- to four-page paper reflecting on the portfolio of papers they have assembled and perhaps on other work in the department. This paper allows students an opportunity to assess the arc of their intellectual development as a religion major. Papers will be submitted to the department chair and distributed to faculty members for evaluation. In the spring semester, faculty and senior majors will meet for a symposium discussion of these self-assessments, to be followed by a festive meal.