

Religious Studies

The study of religion challenges students to explore their own values and understandings of life, exposes them to the various ways that people in differing cultures and time periods have expressed religious beliefs and practices, and helps them examine the importance of religion in culture. Because every culture, both past and present, is strongly shaped by religious beliefs and practices, an appreciation of the religious dimension of human existence is essential for a well-educated individual. Pursuing a major or minor in religious studies allows students to explore the most important questions and issues for human society, while simultaneously learning the critical thinking and communication skills that will be important for success in whatever vocation they choose.

More information can be found online at <https://www.stetson.edu/other/academics/undergraduate/religious-studies.php>.

Learning Outcomes

Student learning outcomes describe what students know, understand and are able to do as a result of completing a degree program. The learning outcomes for this program are:

1. Articulate significant beliefs and rituals in more than one major world religious tradition.
2. Apply critical research methodologies appropriate to research projects in religious studies.
3. Evaluate critically the interplay of religion and other aspects of human culture.

Majors

Major in Religious Studies

- Bachelor of Arts in Religious Studies (<https://catalog.stetson.edu/undergraduate/arts-sciences/religious/religious-studies-ba/>)

Minors

Minor in Religious Studies - 4 units

Code	Title	Units
Requirements		
One unit from the following at the 100-level:		1
RELS 100B	Introduction to Biblical Literature	
RELS 102B	Is That a Religion?	
RELS 103B	Introduction to Asian Religions	
RELS 105B	One God: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam	
RELS 107B	Introduction to Judaism	
RELS 108B	Christian Thought and Doctrine	
RELS 109B	Sacred Traditions of the World	
Three units of RELS electives, of which at least two units must be at the 300- or 400-level. No more than one unit total may come from travel courses with the pass/fail election, teaching apprenticeships (RELS 395), and internships (RELS 397)		3
RELS 380	Department Colloquium	0
or RELS 480	Department Colloquium	
Total Units		4

Advising Course Plans

Advising Course Plans

- Religious Studies Major (https://catalog.stetson.edu/undergraduate/arts-sciences/religious/4year_plan/)
- Religious Studies Major (https://catalog.stetson.edu/undergraduate/arts-sciences/religious/3year_plan/) - Three-Year Plan
- Religious Studies Major (https://catalog.stetson.edu/undergraduate/arts-sciences/religious/rels_2year_plan/) - Two-Year Plan

Faculty

Bell, Christopher

Associate Professor of Religious Studies, 2013

B.A., M.A., Florida State University

Ph.D., University of Virginia

Houston, John Sam

Assistant Professor of Religious Studies, 2020

B.A., Baylor University

M.Div., Princeton Theological Seminary

M.A., Boston College

Ph.D., Florida State University

Palmer, Carmen

Assistant Professor of Religious Studies, 2021

B.A., University of British Columbia

M.Div., Emmanuel College, University of Toronto

Ph.D., University of St. Michael's College

Reddish, Mitchell G.

Professor of Religious Studies and Chair, 1983

O. L. Walker Chair of Christian Studies, 2000

B.A., University of Georgia

M.Div., Ph.D., Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

Courses

RELS 100B. Introduction to Biblical Literature. 1 Unit.

A study of the contents and development of the Hebrew Scriptures, the Apocrypha, and the New Testament, with emphasis on critical methods for biblical study, the influence of the cultures of the ancient Near Eastern and Mediterranean worlds on the Bible, the formative traditions of Judaism and Christianity, and the interpretation of biblical texts. Offered every semester.

RELS 102B. Is That a Religion?. 1 Unit.

When does fandom become a religion? Is fitness a religion? What about Whiteness? What even counts as a religion? By examining common practices that are usually separated from 'organized religion,' we will explore how we can understand them differently if we think of them as religions. From this, students will gain tools for reflecting on how they pursue meaning in their own lives - whether that is spiritual, religious, or otherwise.

RELS 103B. Introduction to Asian Religions. 1 Unit.

An introduction to the beliefs and practices of the religions of the East, including Hinduism, Buddhism, Taoism, Confucianism, and Shinto. By tracing the historical development of these religious traditions and studying the scriptures, doctrines, rituals, ethics, and social institutions, students enter into the worldview of the East. Offered every semester.

RELS 105B. One God: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. 1 Unit.

This course will provide students with an introduction to the history, beliefs, and practices of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. A central premise of the course is that religious traditions are best understood as communities of discourses and practices which shape the subjectivities of their adherents. As a result, comparative analysis of the narrative frameworks, foundational beliefs, and devotional practices which constitute these three Abrahamic faiths provides insight into how their members imagine and act in the world. In taking this approach, students will learn to understand and appreciate the common lineages of these religious traditions, as well as their major differences. The course will also serve as an introduction to studying and thinking about religion in an academic setting, helping students to describe, compare, and interpret religious phenomena. Offered as needed.

RELS 107B. Introduction to Judaism. 1 Unit.

Examines the development of Judaism from its ancient biblical beginnings to the creation of the modern state of Israel. The course includes a study of rituals, practices, and literature of Judaism. Special attention is given to the role of the Holocaust and Diaspora in Jewish history. Offered every semester.

RELS 108B. Christian Thought and Doctrine. 1 Unit.

A study of the development of Christian theologies and doctrines from their roots in Judaism and Greco-Roman philosophies to contemporary understandings. Special attention is given to the development of Christian beliefs as seen in Christian scripture and later writings. Offered every three years.

RELS 109B. Sacred Traditions of the World. 1 Unit.

An introduction to prehistoric religions, new religions, Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism, with attention to scriptures, rituals, ethics, and alternative conceptions of human nature, enlightenment, community life, divinity, gender norms, and life after death. Offered every semester.

RELS 110. Elementary New Testament Greek. 1 Unit.

An introductory study of the written Greek language of the New Testament period. Emphasis is on grammar and vocabulary, leading to translation of selected texts from the Greek New Testament. Offered every other spring semester.

RELS 111. Elementary Biblical Hebrew. 1 Unit.

An introductory study of classical biblical Hebrew. This course concentrates on basic Hebrew vocabulary and grammar, thus preparing the student to translate various readings from the Hebrew Bible. Offered every other spring semester.

RELS 168A. The Bible in Art and Artifact. 1 Unit.

A course that includes optional spring break travel and has two primary aims: (1) to examine artifacts from the ancient Near Eastern world and the Mediterranean world that have a connection to biblical studies, and (2) to study art works in major museums that portray scenes from the Bible. In addition to classroom study of these objects, the course includes optional travel during spring break to major world museums (such as the British Museum, the National Gallery of Art in London, the Louvre, and the Orsay) to examine these objects first-hand. Offered every other spring semester.

RELS 190. Special Topics in Religious Studies. 0.5 to 1 Units.

Varied subject matter according to the interests and expertise of faculty. May be taken more than once for credit.

RELS 190B. Special Topics in Religious Studies: Is That a Religion?. 1 Unit.

When does fandom become a religion? Is fitness a religion? What about Whiteness? What even counts as a religion? By examining common practices that are usually separated from "organized religion," we will explore how we can understand them differently if we think of them as religions. From this, students will gain tools for reflecting on how they pursue meaning in their own lives - whether that is spiritual, religious, or otherwise.

RELS 210. Readings in New Testament Greek. 0.5 Units.

A course designed to help students improve their ability to read ancient Koine Greek. Reading passages will be selected primarily from the New Testament, with some selections chosen from the Septuagint. Prerequisite: RELS 110. Offered as needed.

RELS 211. Readings in Biblical Hebrew. 0.5 Units.

A course designed to help students improve their ability to read biblical Hebrew. Selected passages from the Hebrew Bible will be analyzed for grammatical forms and translated. This course presupposes a basic knowledge of biblical Hebrew. Prerequisite: RELS 111. Offered every other fall semester.

RELS 221H. History of Early Christianity. 1 Unit.

An exploration of Christianity in terms of five essential dimensions: prophetic, ethical, revelatory, monotheistic, and historical dimensions. Students learn the complexities of the development of each dimension during the formative centuries of the church, as well as alternative understandings that competed for attention. Offered every fall semester.

RELS 238V. Religious Ethics and Moral Problems. 1 Unit.

This course focuses on Stetson's Ethical or Spiritual Inquiry Value. An introduction to the study of religious ethics. We will focus on Jewish, Christian, and Muslim approaches to contemporary moral issues such as war/peacemaking, human rights, racial and economic justice, and human sexuality. Over the course of the semester, students will analyze the varied logics and sources of authority undergirding religious arguments while also situating them in their political, economic, and intellectual contexts. In so doing, students will not only gain valuable insight into how these communities imagine and act in the world, but they will also develop their own perspectives on some of today's most pressing moral quandaries.

RELS 241B. Islam: Religion of the Prophet. 1 Unit.

An examination of Islam's history, theology, rituals, spirituality, social organization, scriptures, art, and its cultural and political expressions in the modern world. Offered every two years.

RELS 245B. Muhammad and the Qur'an. 1 Unit.

This course examines the biography of the founder of Islam, the Prophet Muhammad, as well as the Qur'an, the sacred scripture of Muslims. Using primary sources in conjunction with critical secondary literature, we will explore both Muhammad and the Qur'an in historical and contemporary perspective. Thus, while we will discuss the historical Muhammad and the formation of the Qur'an along with the early development of Qur'anic exegesis, we will also focus on modern polemics surrounding the life of Muhammad as well as the roles played by both Muhammad and the Qur'an in Muslim devotional life.

RELS 252B. Religions of China and Japan. 1 Unit.

An examination of religious traditions of East Asia, including Buddhism, Taoism, Confucianism, and Shinto. The course traces the historical development of these traditions and considers the lived experience of believers in the modern world. Students explore religious scriptures, doctrines, rituals, ethics, social institutions, spiritualities, and art and consider alternative conceptions of human nature, enlightenment, community life, divinity, gender roles, and life after death. Offered every two years.

RELS 255B. Apocalyptic Visions and American Culture. 1 Unit.

A study of Jewish and Christian apocalyptic writings, both biblical writings (primarily Daniel and Revelation) and non-biblical texts, culminating in an examination of the extensive use of apocalyptic ideas and imagery in American culture (art, music, literature, movies, religious beliefs).

RELS 256V. Gender and Difference in Biblical Texts and Traditions. 1 Unit.

This course focuses on Stetson's Human Diversity Value. An examination of the role that gender plays in the biblical texts, giving attention to feminist methods of interpretation. Texts that suppress the power of the feminine are examined against those that bring to light positive images. The influence of these texts both in establishing traditional roles for women historically and in shaping patriarchal theologies in our contemporary world is investigated. Offered every fall semester.

RELS 258B. Religions of India. 1 Unit.

An introduction to three major religious traditions originating in India including Hinduism, Sikhism, and Jainism. Student explore the variety of religious experiences available in India by studying and comparing the basic historical, philosophical, spiritual, sociological, ritual, and mythical dimensions of these traditions. Offered every spring semester.

RELS 268. The World of the Bible I: The Middle East. 0.5 or 1 Units.

A travel course, providing a study of major historical, archaeological, and religious (Jewish, Christian, and Muslim) sites in selected countries of the Middle East, such as Israel, Jordan, and Egypt. The major focus of the course is on the ancient world. Offered every four years.

RELS 269. The World of the Bible II: The Mediterranean World. 0.5 or 1 Units.

A travel course, providing a study of major historical, archaeological, and religious sites in selected Mediterranean countries, such as Italy, Greece, and Turkey. The major focus of the course is on the ancient world. Offered every four years.

RELS 277V. Between Martin and Malcolm: Religion, Civil Rights, and the Black Freedom Movement. 1 Unit.

This course focuses on Stetson's Social Justice Value. This course examines the role of religion in the civil rights movements primarily through the lives and work of two icons of the Black freedom movement: Martin Luther King, Jr. and Malcolm X (El-Hajj Malik El-Shabazz). We will take seriously their intellectual and political evolutions, and in so doing, move beyond understandings of King and X as polar opposites even as we continue to acknowledge the tensions between them. Along the way, we will also explore the intersections of religion, race, and politics in relation to the role of civil disobedience and (non)violence in socio-political change, leadership and movement building, gendered dynamics of the movements, and the movements in transnational perspective. Finally, we will consider civil rights movements in Florida as well as their legacies for us today.

RELS 281V. Moral Reflections on the Holocaust. 1 Unit.

This course focuses on Stetson's Ethical or Spiritual Inquiry Value. An examination of the theological and ethical questions raised by the Holocaust, which saw the murder of six million Jews and five million non-Jews between the years 1933 and 1945. The course evaluates contemporary philosophical, ethical, and theological responses to the Holocaust, addressing such topics as the absence of God, religious faith in a post-Holocaust age, and the problem of evil and suffering.

RELS 282B. The American Jewish Experience. 1 Unit.

An exploration of the unique experience of Jews in America. Immigrant biographies and personal reflections, together with journals and historical records, are studied in order to understand both early and contemporary "American Jewish life" as a dynamic phenomenon that has adapted to a variety of social and cultural challenges.

RELS 285. Independent Study. 0.5 or 1 Units.

This course is initiated by student interest and contingent upon the expertise of current departmental faculty. Students may take more than one RELS 285, RELS 385, or RELS 485 course during their career with different titles and content.

RELS 290. Special Topics in Religious Studies. 1 Unit.

Varied subject matter according to the interests and expertise of faculty. May be taken more than once for credit.

RELS 290A. Spec Topic Religious Studies. 1 Unit.**RELS 302V. The American Christian Experience. 1 Unit.**

This course focuses on Stetson's Ethical or Spiritual Inquiry Value. An examination of the history, beliefs, and practices of significant Christian churches in the United States, including the Puritans, Baptists, Quakers, Methodists, Episcopalians, Presbyterians, Roman Catholics, Eastern Orthodox and Pentecostals. The course also explores controversial ethical issues in the historical development of American Christian churches.

RELS 305B. Shapers of Christian Thought. 1 Unit.

An introduction to individuals whose ideas and writings have influenced the formation and development of Christian thought, such as Plato, Pelagius, Augustine, and Anselm. May be taken more than once for credit. Offered every three years.

RELS 311H. The Dead Sea Scrolls. 1 Unit.

A study of the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls, their contents, the community that produced them, the historical events that shaped the origin and development of the community, and the continuing significance of these Jewish writings. Offered every three years.

RELS 312V. Immigrants, Outsiders, and the Biblical Tradition. 1 Unit.

This course focuses on Stetson's Ethical or Spiritual Inquiry Value. Who is the "resident alien" within biblical legal tradition, and what were the dynamics of this individual and others on the fringes of ancient communities? And, how may these writings be relevant to contemporary audiences with regard to migration, insiders, and outsiders? We will approach the topic by addressing a variety of issues, including the manners in which legal writings were utilized in the ancient Near East, how biblical laws were edited and reworked over time, and in what ways the contexts of ancient communities influenced perceptions of the "Other." Importantly, the course offers fresh avenues of exploration for contemporary legal and justice issues concerning newcomers and marginalized groups.

RELS 313V. Prophets of Social Justice. 1 Unit.

This course focuses on Stetson's Social Justice Value. An examination of the call for social justice found in the Hebrew prophets and the appropriation of their message by voices for liberation. Modern calls for social justice are examined against biblical demands. Offered every other spring semester.

RELS 315B. Monsters and Beasts in the Bible. 1 Unit.

Whether plain old monsters such as dragons and sea creatures, or divine entities with wings, biblical narratives exhibit monstrous figures galore. Why are these monsters here? What do they do and represent? This course explores various monsters in writings that were included in or excluded from the Bible. We will discover the ways that monsters may function to demarcate uncertainties in both the physical and heavenly realms, whether in the ancient world or contemporary representations.

RELS 316V. In Search of Jesus. 1 Unit.

This course focuses on Stetson's Ethical or Spiritual Inquiry Value. An examination of major historical and theological questions surrounding Jesus of Nazareth. How reliable are the accounts in the New Testament gospels? What were his teachings and beliefs? How were the Jesus traditions shaped by the early Christian communities and the gospel writers? The course also explores how various ancient and modern portrayals of Jesus are shaped by individual and cultural expectations. Offered every spring semester. Junior Seminar.

RELS 317V. The Gospels. 1 Unit.

This course focuses on Stetson's Ethical or Spiritual Inquiry Value. A study of the life and teachings of Jesus as presented in the four gospels in the New Testament. This course gives major attention to the differences among the gospel accounts and the emphases of the individual gospel writers. Offered every three years.

RELS 318V. Life and Letters of Paul. 1 Unit.

This course focuses on Stetson's Ethical or Spiritual Inquiry Value. A study of one of the most important figures in the history of Christianity - Paul of Tarsus. The course includes an examination of the life and background of Paul and an investigation of the purpose and content of his letters. Offered every three years.

RELS 334V. Buddhism: The Middle Way. 1 Unit.

This course focuses on Stetson's Ethical or Spiritual Inquiry Value. An examination of the history, philosophy, rituals, mythology, and art of Buddhism. Beginning with the life of the Buddha, the course traces the development of Buddhism in India and its transplantation to other parts of Asia. Schools studied include Tibetan Buddhism, Zen Buddhism, and American forms of Buddhism. The course also discusses the complex interaction between Buddhism and Hinduism. Offered every two years.

RELS 335V. Religion and Violence in Asia. 1 Unit.

This course focuses on Stetson's Human Diversity Value. This course will examine instances across Asia where religion and violence intersect. Through the lens of conflict, this course will examine traditions such as Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, Confucianism, Daoism, and Shinto. The goal of the course will be to dispel stereotypes concerning religious violence and to explore the religious arguments used to justify violence. Offered every two years.

RELS 336B. Society and the Supernatural in Asia. 1 Unit.

An exploration of literary and folkloric accounts of the supernatural in several Asian milieus. Students will explore beliefs about Indian demons, Chinese fox spirits, and Japanese ghosts, and examine how these beliefs are shaped by history and religious traditions. Major themes will include family life, religious specialists, and community activities, all of which respond to the threat or promise of the supernatural in various ways. Offered every two years.

RELS 337B. The Religion and Culture of Hinduism. 1 Unit.

A study of the religious life and practices of Hindus, examining the pre-Aryan roots of Hinduism, the philosophy of the Upanishads and the Bhagavad-Gita, the mythology and iconography of key Hindu gods and goddesses, primary modes of Hindu worship and devotion, and emerging forms of Hinduism in America. Offered every two years.

RELS 361B. Reform and Revolution in Modern Islam. 1 Unit.

This course examines Islam and its adherents from the era of colonial modernity to the present, with a focus on figures and movements of reform, renewal, and revolution in the wake of Western political and cultural domination. The course will investigate a basic question: What happened to different Muslim communities and intellectuals (specifically those in the Arab world, Iran, Turkey, and West Africa) as they responded to the challenges posed by "Westernization" and "modernization?" Moreover, it will explore the relatively new phenomenon of Islam in America. The class concludes with an investigation of various contemporary debates in the Islamic world, including feminism, the refugee crisis, and American/Western responses to Islam and Muslims.

RELS 363B. Resisting Religion. 1 Unit.

This course will explore the conceptual developments behind atheism, agnosticism, and irreligious perspectives in world history. Using the lens of religious studies, students will examine nonreligious positions through the negotiations, tensions, and challenges they pose to religious traditions. This course does not promote or advocate atheism or irreligion, rather, students will examine and critique voices reacting against religious hegemonies. The course will also explore ritualized atheism in the Church of Satan and parody religions like Jediism. The goal of this course is to instill a proper understanding of nontheistic perspectives and consider the fluctuating boundaries of seemingly defined religious traditions.

RELS 364B. Genies, Saints, and Superheroes: The Moral Imagination of Muslim Literatures. 1 Unit.

In this course, we will explore historic and contemporary Muslim literatures as sources of moral wisdom and social critique. From the ancient Middle Eastern folktales of One Thousand and One Nights to the poetry of Rumi to the comics superhero Ms. Marvel, these literary traditions seek to entertain, impart wisdom, and imagine alternative worlds for the purposes of conveying critical truths about this one. In reading such literary works, students will gain a better understanding of Islam and its many cultural expressions, explore the use of literature as a source of moral formation and social critique, and address contemporary social issues around Orientalism/Islamophobia and the politics of representation in popular media.

RELS 365B. Mary, Max, and Mozart: Religion and European Culture. 1 Unit.

This course examines the interplay of religion and culture within Europe and particularly Austria. Participants consider the impact of the Grail Legends, the cult of Mary, and the Reformation and Counter Reformation on Medieval Tyrol, and visit several relevant sites. The music of Mozart and Wagner, challengers to National Socialism, and current post-war efforts at restitution and reconciliation are also discussed. A summer Innsbruck study abroad course. Offered every other summer.

RELS 370. Methods and Theories in the Study of Religion. 1 Unit.

An examination of the scholarly attempts to understand, describe, and relate to the sacred. Attention is given to critical methods of social science, philosophy, theology, history, textual studies, and phenomenology. The course also focuses on preparation for the senior research project. Prerequisites: Restricted to majors; Junior standing. Writing enhanced course. Offered every fall semester.

RELS 380. Department Colloquium. 0.0 Units.

Pass/Fail only. A critical examination of current developments in religious studies. Prerequisite: RELS major or minor. Offered every fall semester.

RELS 385. Independent Study. 0.5 or 1 Units.

This course is initiated by student interest and contingent upon the expertise of current departmental faculty. Students may take more than one RELS 285, RELS 385, or RELS 485 course during their career with different titles and content.

RELS 390. Special Topics in Religious Studies. 1 Unit.

Varied subject matter according to the interests and expertise of faculty. May be taken more than once for credit.

RELS 390B. Special Topics. 1 Unit.**RELS 395. Teaching Apprenticeship. 0.5 Units.**

Pass/Fail only. Provides an opportunity for select religious studies majors or minors to work closely with a faculty member in planning, teaching, and evaluating a lower-division course. The student also pursues independent study in the subject matter of the course. Prerequisite: junior or senior status and permission of the department chair. May be repeated once.

RELS 397. Internship in Religious Studies. 0.5 or 1 Units.

Pass/Fail only. Through placement in an approved setting such as a religious institution, a non-profit organization, or a social-service agency, students will have an opportunity to enrich their classroom knowledge with experience in religious, ethical, or social justice issues. Typically, full unit internships require 140 hours for the semester. Specific requirements will be presented by way of a contract signed by the student. Requirements may include a journal, research paper, or appropriate work product, and a letter of evaluation from the site supervisor. Prerequisites: permission of department chair and instructor, religious studies major or minor, successful completion of two courses in religious studies, and junior or senior status. May be repeated for credit, but a maximum of one credit may be applied to the major or minor. Enrollment in an internship course requires students to attend an orientation prior to beginning work at their internship site. For more information regarding internship orientations, please contact Career & Professional Development at career@stetson.edu or 386-822-7315.

RELS 412V. Envisioning the Psalms. 1 Unit.

This course focuses on Stetson's Ethical or Spiritual Inquiry Value. An introduction to the world of the psalmists, examining the prayers and laments of ancient Israel. The images and metaphors of the psalms are explored in order to comprehend the worldview behind the texts. Students explore how both ancient and modern readers find instruction, prayer, and praise in the poetry of the psalms. Offered every other spring semester.

RELS 480. Department Colloquium. 0.0 Units.

Pass/Fail only. A critical examination of current developments in religious studies. Prerequisite: RELS major or minor. Offered every fall semester.

RELS 485. Independent Study. 0.5 or 1 Units.

This course is initiated by student interest and contingent upon the expertise of current departmental faculty. Students may take more than one RELS 285, RELS 385, or RELS 485 course during their career with different titles and content.

RELS 490. Special Topics in Religious Studies. 1 Unit.

Varied subject matter according to the interests and expertise of faculty. May be taken more than once for credit.

RELS 499. Senior Project. 1 Unit.

Directed, independent research, culminating in a major research paper and an oral presentation. It is a capstone course in which the student demonstrates her/his research, critical thinking, and communication skills. Prerequisites: RELS 370, senior status, and permission of the department chair. Writing enhanced course. Offered every semester.