Tolerance: A Global History. In this course we will explore the ways that global Christianity laid the groundwork for European ideas about diversity and tolerance. The aim of the course is to understand how the historically contingent confrontations with religious diversity were foundational to, and indeed, shaped the terms of the development of modern assumptions not only about religious tolerance, but also about tolerance of cultural diversity broadly speaking. One of the primary learning goals for students is to 1) gain the skills to interpret primary texts in order to 2) understand how the category of "religious" difference, while not disappearing, eventually ceded primacy of place to notions of "cultural" and "racial" differences by the end of the first era of globalization such that 3) all of these terms became foundational to understandings about the nature of human diversity, not only in the era of the European Enlightenment (18th century) but also today, as we continue to fight our own "culture wars" about difference and diversity.

We will treat the European religious wars following the Reformation, but given that the primary aim of the course is to historicize the perceived possibilities and limits of "tolerance" in a global context, the bulk of the readings will demonstrate how ideas about human "sameness" and "difference" emerged from face-to-face encounters and conflicts in the first era of globalization. The course will foreground the entangled histories of early modern missionary encounters as the ground for working out ideas about how one ought to think about religious diversity in the global world and how modern ideas about tolerance emerged from early modern debates about what religious differences might be tolerated and which were "idolatrous."

For the past several centuries, human nature has been described through the unique capacity to think and reason. Over the past several decades, however, humans have become increasingly successful at designing machines to think and reason, the very activity that seems so central to human experience. The rapid emergence of intelligent machines is creating new attention to older questions that have concerned religion scholars for some time. Could a machine ever be spiritual? Is consciousness unique to humans? Could consciousness reside in things such as machines? How did Westerners come to view matter-versus-spirit in an oppositional manner? How has religion shaped the way Westerners view the capacity to be sentient and to act (subjectivity) and the lack of this capacity (objecthood)? What have the intellectual and religious traditions of West Africa (Orisha ontology), East Asia, and Indigenous America asserted about the nature of things versus the nature of people? Do all societies today share the same assumptions about the nature of personhood? If technologists throughout the globe succeed in developing cognitive machines that rival or surpass human intelligence, will these machines become human?

This course examines the problems of religion and humanity that artificial intelligence (AI) is currently generating. Students will read texts by religion scholars, AI technologists, cognitive scientists, and philosophers of the mind to understand the theoretical, philosophical, and technological foundations for older religious claims about the nature of people and things. Students will study and understand (1) the conceptual paradigms on which claims of human exceptional are based; (2) religious claims about bodies and souls; 3) the basic architecture of cognitive machines; (4) what recent brain research reveals about human cognition; and (5) recent theoretical efforts (e.g., integrated information theory) to account for consciousness in things and people. On this basis, students will learn to engage skillfully with both classical and contemporary accounts of people versus things that are emerging in response to the rapid progress in AI.
REL 170 Introduction to Religion • Kieckhefer • Mondays, Wednesdays & Fridays 1:00-1:50pm

This course has three main goals: (1) It will provide an introduction to Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Students should gain a basic "literacy" in each of these traditions; (2) It will encourage students to become comfortable thinking analytically about religion. The course will discuss how various scholars have understood what religion "is," and explore several lenses through which they analyze it (mythology; ritual, worship and sacred space; prayer and meditation; morality, ethics, and politics; and gender and sexuality); (3) Students will apply their religious literacy, along with their newfound analytic skills to identify similarities, but also differences between and among religious traditions.

REL 210 Introduction to Buddhism • Preston • Tuesdays & Thursdays 12:30-1:50pm

This course might be called an introduction to Buddhisms and Buddhists, with an emphasis on the plural. Throughout the course, we will study the various philosophies, traditions, and practices oriented around the Buddha and his teachings, the historical journey of Buddhist ideas and practices through Asia, the people who observe these forms of Buddhism (from followers of Amitabha to Zen), and interactions between Buddhist groups and governments. We will begin by studying the origin of Buddhism’s fundamental teachings in the context of Indian religion and society, and we will proceed to trace the tradition and its developments in Sri Lanka, Southeast Asia, Tibet, China, Korea, and Japan. We will have occasion to look at Buddhism's spread to the United States and the politics of its return to modern India. Along the way, we will be analyzing primary texts and philosophies, viewing and discussing ritual practices, learning the socio-political contexts in which Buddhist ideas developed and exist today, noting transformative interactions with other religions, and hearing the stories and experiences of practicing Buddhists. One component of the course will be to visit a Buddhist religious site and to write about the experience.

PHIL 266 Philosphy of Religion • Seeskin • Mondays, Wednesdays & Fridays 10:00-10:50pm

This course will investigate fundamental issues raised by the theory and practice of the three great monotheistic religions: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Among the questions to be addressed are: What is God? Can one prove the existence of God? Is there an inherent conflict between faith and reason? If God is all good, why do we experience evil? Is there any way we can overcome the lure of sin? What does it mean to love God? Students will be expected to understand and evaluate alternative answers to each of the questions we examine. They will also be expected to articulate and defend what they consider to be the best alternative. Class Materials: Selections from Kierkegaard, Alfarabi, Anselm, Aquinas, Hume, Kant, and Rosenzweig.
REL 230 Introduction to Judaism • Sufrin • MW 9:30-10:50am

This course will examine core aspects of Judaism and their development from the religion's biblical beginnings through today. Against the background of Jewish and world history, we will seek to understand the roots and evolution of Jewish rituals, literature, traditions, and beliefs. Judaism and Jewishness have changed so much over the centuries that sometimes this might seem like a course in comparative religion. Our challenge will be to understand why these changes occurred while also identifying the continuities that connect Jews across time and space.

REL 309 Indian Secularism and Religious Nationalism (RLP) • Preston • MW 3:30-4:50pm

India was founded as a secular nation, but the current right-wing government frequently employs rhetoric of Hindu nationalism. Is secularism threatened? Meanwhile, the Hindu nationalists accuse the left-wing, which advocates for pluralism and on behalf of minority religions, of being mere “pseudo-secularists.” How can the Hindu nationalists consider themselves the true secularists? In this course, we will tackle these questions, and others, by exploring the history and nature of the unique form of secularism that developed in India. We will also examine, courteously, the ideas and activities of the Hindu nationalist movement. Throughout the class, we will hold lively debates about the intersection of secularism and Hindu nationalism, particularly in light of recent and current events. From Gandhi to Modi, from destroyed mosques to banned books, from the Indian Constitution to recent Bollywood flicks (we will watch and discuss one!), these debates about secularism and religious nationalism are woven through the fabric of modern Indian history, politics, legal systems, religious identity, and everyday lives. Come join the chaat!

The course counts towards Religion, Law and Politics (RLP) major concentration. Open to all students – freshman, sophomore, juniors, seniors!

REL 349 Why College? • Helmer • T 2:00-4:50pm

This seminar will give undergraduates the opportunity to reflect critically, thoughtfully, and together with peers, on the question: why go to college? There are many expectations that parents and society place on the college experience. But now that we are in college, how shall we think about it? Is it an experience or is it an education? Is it a ticket to a job or is it the pursuit of knowledge? What do professors do? How is contemporary culture reflected in the university? We address various facets of college life, from diversity and justice to sex and sexism on campus, from the “party pathway” to technology. We explore the value of the humanities. We survey the history of the university, investigate its religious origins, and learn about the “crisis” of the contemporary university.
This course explores gender and sexuality from the birth of Islam in seventh-century Arabia to Muslim communities in the United States today. The course has two primary aims that inform each other and are at times in tension. Firstly, students will examine diverse cosmologies and debates regarding gender and sexuality in the Islamic tradition and Muslim societies. At the same time, we will reflect on how recent theories of gender and sexuality impact the study of religion, and Islam in particular. Among the questions we will pursue are: How is gender constructed in classical Muslim sources? How has the history of the early Muslim community been variously interpreted to create “Islamic norms”? How do changing social, historical, and political conditions influence Islamic discourses on women’s bodily autonomy, masculinity, and desire? Is there such a thing as Islamic feminism and what might it look like? Who speaks for and against it? What are the possibilities for egalitarian transformation in Islamic thinking and the Muslim world? This is a reading intensive course that draws on primary source texts (the Quran, prophetic tradition, Islamic law), as well as ethnography, literature, film, and media. The course counts towards Religion, Sexuality and Gender (RSG) major concentration.

The most active participants in American religious life are, and have always been, women. Perhaps that is surprising since most religious leaders have historically been men. Or have they? This course focuses on the religious lives of women in the United States, how they understand and navigate religious authority, and the contributions of women religious leaders. We will learn about women prophets and visionaries who founded new religious movements or changed the ways established religions were understood and practiced. We will also examine how everyday religious women have claimed, resisted, and subverted religious authority throughout American religious history. This class will introduce students to different religious traditions in the US, including Native American religions, Spirituality, Catholicism, Mormonism, and Evangelicalism, and it will also serve as an introduction to gender analysis and what it means to use gender as critical lens. The course counts towards Religion, Sexuality and Gender (RSG) major concentration.
REL 379/SESP 351 Religion and Identity • Shapiro • TTH 11:00-12:20pm

Using a multi-disciplinary approach, this seminar-style course investigates the construct of "religion" in the contemporary American context and examines the ways in which religious systems and beliefs intersect with other primary identity categories and group memberships. We will work through the social construction and experience of religion(s) for both the group and the individual. Particular thought will be given to whose "group" and whose "religion" is at work shaping experience. Many social scientific studies of religion tend to focus on mapping out and making sense of practices, patterns of affiliation, etc. We will instead examine how "religion" and religious ideas are manifest in everyday lives and experiences, even for those who are unaffiliated or understand themselves as non-religious. By looking at how religions and religious beliefs interact with a variety of other types of individual and collective identities and discourses such as ethnicity, race, gender, and American-ness, and in turn, how each of these shapes the American cultural landscape writ large, we will aim to gain insight into the importance and role of religion in contemporary American life and in the lives of Americans.

We will start by examining a number of theories of "religion" in order to best understand what it is/isn't and how it is/isn't differentiated from other types of beliefs (such as political ideology, "culture," and so on). We will also work towards developing an understanding of the dominant cultural narrative(s) in the mainstream American context and examine the role that "religion" historically and in the contemporary context plays in shaping those narratives so as to be able to make sense of the ways in which these narratives affect the ways in which groups construct and experience their own identities and realities and "others" various groups. The remainder of the course will work through a series of case studies, looking at how religion is manifested in, for example, class, race, ethnicity, gender, and place, as well as how each of these categories is in turn constitutive of religious identity and/or group membership in the contemporary American context. The course will illustrate that religious discourses are prolific and have profound impact in individual and group lives. Further, we will see that "religion" is not a static construct, but instead is perpetually evolving, affecting individual identities and experience, and both local/group specific and larger cultural and national narratives.

REL 395 Theories of Religion • Taylor • TH 2:00-4:50pm

What is "theory"? What does it mean to have a theory about something? How are theories helpful? What do theories do? What is "religion"? How do things get excluded or included in this category? What counts as "religious" and why? Who gets to decide? This course is an introduction to foundational theories of religion and to the history of the construction of the category of "religion" over time. Throughout the term, you will be working on formulating your own theory of religion, which you will articulate and defend in your final seminar paper. In this course, you will gain (as ritual theorist Catherine Bell says) "the skills and tools to make sure that very complicated situations and ideas can be put into words, thereby making it possible to have discussions about issues that can only be discussed if there is language for reflexivity, nuance, counter-evidence, and doubt." In the process, you will be asked to make theory translatable to your peers by actively engaging theoretical concepts in creative ways.
REL 471-20/GSS 490/HIST 405 Embodiment/Materiality/Affect • Molina • M 11:00-1:30pm

This seminar explores theoretical approaches to the problems of embodiment/materiality/affect. One aim of the course is to examine various methodological approaches to embodiment, materiality and affect, making use of sociology and philosophy (Pierre Bourdieu, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Spinoza, Massumi). The second and closely related aim is to situate bodies in time and place, that is, in history. Here we look to the particular circumstances that shaped the manner in which historical actors experienced their bodies in the Christian west (Peter Brown, Caroline Bynum, Mary Carruthers, Michel de Certeau, Michel Foucault). Ultimately, we will be examining theoretical tools while we put them to work. The goal: how to use these thinkers to write more dynamic, creative, interesting scholarship?

REL 471-21 Late Medieval Religion: Conversations and Controversies • Kieckhefer • T 2:00-4:50pm

All the controversies that came clearly into view in the sixteenth century were already anticipated in the last medieval centuries. And the conflicts among historical subjects can be seen mirrored in debates among modern scholars. Religion in the late medieval West has for some time been vigorously discussed and debated, across disciplinary and sometimes also denominational lines. The most widely respected scholars, such as Eamon Duffy and Caroline Walker Bynum, are not only emulated but also challenged. Theoretical issues sometimes lie at the heart of controversy. Views about the relationship between medieval and Reformation religion continue to generate conflict. More unexpected issues also arise: how precisely to conceive and define heresy; how far literacy and reading habits supported traditional commitment, or when and whether they fostered dissent; how to map the boundaries, if any, separating devotional practice from superstition and magic. Venerable clichés about late medieval religion—its emphasis on the humanity of Christ, or its neurotically penitential character—are now much disputed. We will plunge into all these conversations and controversies in an effort to see just why late medieval religion is so controversial. This seminar should be of interest to historians, religionists, art historians, and students of medieval and early modern literature.

REL 471-22/POLI SCI 490 Religion, Race and Global Politics • Hurd • Wednesdays 9:00-11:30am

This seminar examines critical themes at the intersection of religion, race, and global politics. We will explore how particular constructions of “religion” and “race” inform contemporary scholarship, and authorize national and international legal and governmental practice. These questions will be examined in a variety of contexts ranging from antisuperstition laws in Haiti, to the rise of Christian free enterprise in the aisles of Wal-Mart, to the celebration of “moderate” religion at the US State Department, to the politics of immigration, and beyond. Topics include religion and the rise of the nation-state; the politics of religious establishment and religious freedom; the role of race in the formation of the disciplines of religious studies and international relations; the formation of modern vocabularies of religious exclusion (e.g., “superstition,” “vodou,” “folk religion”); and the role of religiosity and religious affect in neoliberal experience. Our readings will traverse disciplinary boundaries to explore these questions by drawing on new work that draws together the study of international relations, religion, law, anthropology and history.