RELIGIOUS STUDIES (RELST)

RELST 1110 - Beginning Biblical Hebrew (3 Credits)
Crosslisted with HEBRW 1110, JWST 1110, NES 1110
This course is designed to introduce students to the language, grammar, and vocabulary of the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament. By the end of the semester students will be able to read and understand a number of biblical narrative passages, drawn from texts such as the stories of: creation in the Garden of Eden, Noah's Ark, Joseph and his brothers, the Israelites' exodus from Egypt, David and Goliath, and others stories students are interested in reading in the original language. Emphasis will be placed on learning vocabulary in context so that students begin to understand the language of the Bible as a window on ancient Israelite religion, culture, and experience.
Exploratory Studies: (CU-ITL)

Last Four Terms Offered: Fall 2022, Spring 2020
Schedule of Classes (https://classes.cornell.edu/)

RELST 1710 - The Jewish Atlantic: 1492-1850 (3 Credits)
Crosslisted with HIST 1710, JWST 1710
Who were the Jews that first settled in the Americas and around the Atlantic? How did their experiences intersect with processes of colonization, empire-building, racialization, and the formation of an interconnected Atlantic World? How did they maintain trans-national bonds with other Jews around the world? This course will explore these and many other questions by reconstructing the rise of the Sephardi Diaspora following the 1492 expulsion of Jews from Spain, their settlement patterns across Europe, Africa, and the Americas, their global economic activities, and the dynamic ways they mapped onto religious, political, and racial schema of the period. (HIST-HPE, HIST-HTR)
Distribution Requirements: (CA-AG, HA-AG), (GLC-AS, HST-AS)
Last Four Terms Offered: Fall 2023, Spring 2023
Schedule of Classes (https://classes.cornell.edu/)

RELST 2060 - Introduction to Africana Religions (3 Credits)
Crosslisted with ASRC 2060, AMST 2055
This course explores the history of religions among people of African descent from the period of the development of the transatlantic slave trade (1440s) to the present. Its aim is to introduce students to the complex ways religion has shaped their lifeworlds. Such study involves, among other things, encounters with the religious cultures of slaves and slaveholders in the antebellum South; the development of independent Black churches, the effects of emancipation, migration, and urbanization upon Black religious life; new black religious movements (e.g., Nation of Islam, Father Divine's Peace Mission Movement, Black Hebrews); the emergence of Black secularism/humanism; the impact of Black religious expressive culture (e.g., music, sermon, song, and film); the religious dimensions of the Civil Rights and Black Power movements; as well as contemporary developments and transformations in Black religious life. All of which requires attentiveness to how we tell the story of Africana religions, and how scholars have developed and pursued the modern study of Africana religion.
Distribution Requirements: (D-AG, HA-AG), (HST-AS, SCD-AS)
Last Four Terms Offered: Fall 2025, Fall 2024, Fall 2023
Schedule of Classes (https://classes.cornell.edu/)

RELST 2154 - Sex and Power in Jewish History (4 Credits)
Crosslisted with HIST 2154, JWST 2851
Jewish men and women in early modern Europe lived their lives within a gendered social order inherited from the Talmudic period. The relationship between sex and power remained fundamental to Jewish communal discipline until the eighteenth century. The explosion of vernacular publishing, increasing economic and geographic mobility and the coming of emancipation challenged existing gender norms and liberated Jewish desire - well, almost. As we will see, modernity has an ambiguous effect on Jewish sexual expression and Jewish sexual politics. It is not clear that the emancipation of Jewish men had the same emancipatory effect on Jewish women. Jewish patriarchy proved unexpectedly resilient. In this course, we will explore why - despite Judaism's reputation for liberal attitudes to sex - neither most Jewish men nor many Jewish women embraced the possibilities of personal liberation from a reproductive regime of rigid self-control and near compulsory heterosexual monogamy. (HIST-HEU)
Distribution Requirements: (D-AG, HA-AG), (HST-AS, SCD-AS)
Last Four Terms Offered: Fall 2026
Schedule of Classes (https://classes.cornell.edu/)

RELST 2155 - The Invention of Religion (4 Credits)
Crosslisted with HIST 2155, JWST 2155
Religion is a term with a rich history but without a precise definition. Everyone can describe a religious idea or a religious experience even though there is no agreement about what it is that makes an idea or an experience religious. How did this state of things come about? What is it that makes religion both one thing and many things? Why do we apply this concept to Christianity, Islam and Judaism and to the deep feelings we associate with secular forms of devotion and enthusiasm - for food, for love, for family, for art, for sport? In this seminar, we will discover that religion is a distinctly modern concept, developed to address the psychological and social needs of Europeans increasingly adrift from the traditional communal practices and moral commitments of their parents and grandparents. Tracing the history of religion - rather than the history of religions - from the age of Immanuel Kant to the age of Emmanuel Levinas, we will examine paradoxical connection between the rise of religion and the decline of faith. (HIST-HEU, HIST-HPE)
Distribution Requirements: (ETM-AS, HST-AS), (HA-AG, KCM-AG)
Last Four Terms Offered: Spring 2026, Fall 2023, Fall 2018
Schedule of Classes (https://classes.cornell.edu/)

RELST 2204 - Introduction to Quranic Arabic (3 Credits)
Crosslisted with ARAB 2204, ASRC 2204, NES 2204
This course is designed for students who are interested in reading the language of the Qur'an with accuracy and understanding. The first week (4 classes) will be devoted to an introduction of the history of the Qur'an: the revelation, collection, variant readings, and establishment of an authoritative edition. The last week will be devoted to a general overview of revisionist literature on the Qur'an. In the remaining 12 weeks, we will cover all of Part 30 (Juz' 'Amma, suuras 78-114) and three suuras of varying length (36, 19, and 12).
Prerequisites: ARAB 1201 or equivalent or permission of instructor.
Distribution Requirements: (FL-AG, HA-AG), (HST-AS)
Exploratory Studies: (CU-ITL); (AFAREA, AFLANG)

Last Four Terms Offered: Spring 2026, Spring 2025, Spring 2024, Spring 2023
Schedule of Classes (https://classes.cornell.edu/)

RELST 2208 - The History of Religious Life in Imperial China (4 Credits)
Crosslisted with HIST 2208, ASIAN 2251
In this course we will learn about the rich varieties of religious life in imperial China, focusing on major historical transformations between the tenth and sixteenth centuries. We will investigate the organization of pantheons and human relations with the divine, and consider how they might illuminate social relations. We will examine the ways in which religious rites and festivals helped to constitute social groupings such as families, communities, sects, and states. We will consider the roles of texts, theatrical performances, and clergy in transmitting and transforming understandings of the human, natural, and divine worlds. Finally, we will explore the spatial organization of the sacred in bodies, things, sites, and landscapes. (ASIAN-RL, HIST-HAN, HIST-HPE)
Distribution Requirements: (ALC-AS, HST-AS), (CA-AG, HA-AG, LA-AG)
Last Four Terms Offered: Spring 2022
Schedule of Classes (https://classes.cornell.edu/)

RELST 2248 - Indian Ocean Buddhism (3 Credits)
Crosslisted with ASIAN 2248, HIST 2548
Buddhism is now a global religion. How did it become one? Well before the digital age, traveling Buddhists and Buddhist objects moved across vast geographies, transforming communities along the way. The Indian Ocean — connecting West Asia to East Asia via South and Southeast Asia — was (and remains) crucial to Buddhist circulations. Looking at textual and visual materials from premodern times to the present day, this course shows how changing trans-regional conditions shape local Buddhisms, how Buddhist collectives around the Indian Ocean arena shape one another, and how trade, religion, and politics interact. (ASIAN-GE, HIST-HAN)
Distribution Requirements: (HA-AG), (HST-AS)
Exploratory Studies: (SAAREA, SEAREA)

Last Four Terms Offered: Spring 2026, Spring 2025, Fall 2022, Fall 2021
Schedule of Classes (https://classes.cornell.edu/)

RELST 2250 - Introduction to Asian Religions (3 Credits)
Crosslisted with ASIAN 2250
This course will explore religious traditions in South Asia (Pakistan, India, and Sri Lanka) and East Asia (China, Japan, and Korea) including Hinduism, Buddhism (South Asian and East Asian), Sikhism, Confucianism, Daoism, and Shinto. We will also encounter a wide range of religious expressions, including myth, ritual, pilgrimage, mysticism, meditation, and other spiritual technologies. (ASIAN-GE)
Distribution Requirements: (ALC-AS, HST-AS), (CA-AG, HA-AG, LA-AG)
Exploratory Studies: (EAAREA, SAAREA)

Last Four Terms Offered: Spring 2026, Spring 2025, Spring 2024, Spring 2023
Schedule of Classes (https://classes.cornell.edu/)

RELST 2273 - Religion and Ecological Sustainability (3 Credits)
Crosslisted with ASIAN 2273
This course introduces the academic study of religion. This course serves as both an introduction to the academic study of religion and a survey of major topics in the intersections of religious communities and environmentally sustainable practices. Using real cases of environmentally sustainable, religiously oriented communities, we explore how myth, ritual, symbols, doctrines, and ideologies of time and space are activated in practical living decisions. This class involves readings of both primary sources, poetry and literature, secondary sources, films and site visits. (ASIAN-RL)
Distribution Requirements: (CA-AG, KCM-AG), (ETM-AS, GLC-AS)
Exploratory Studies: (CU-SBY)

Last Four Terms Offered: Fall 2025, Fall 2024, Fall 2023, Fall 2022
Schedule of Classes (https://classes.cornell.edu/)

RELST 2279 - Chinese Mythology (3 Credits)
Crosslisted with ASIAN 2279
Students will study Chinese myths from the earliest times. Focus will be on understanding how people have used myth to create and convey meaning, on examining the form Chinese myths take, and on considering how they are related to religion, literature, historical accounts, and intellectual trends. (ASIAN-LL)
Distribution Requirements: (ALC-AS, HST-AS), (CA-AG, HA-AG, LA-AG)
Exploratory Studies: (EAAREA)

Last Four Terms Offered: Spring 2026, Fall 2024, Spring 2022, Spring 2021
Schedule of Classes (https://classes.cornell.edu/)

RELST 2287 - Gods, Ghosts, and Gurus: A Global Exploration of the Fantastic in Asian Religions (3 Credits)
Crosslisted with ASIAN 2287, SHUM 2287
This course serves as an introduction to key concepts in the study of the Fantastic, a fundamental analytic category in several academic disciplines, including literature, psychology, anthropology, art, and religion. Asia, the continent with the world?s largest population and the birthplace for several major religious traditions, is replete with narratives, beliefs and artistic practices which traverse the Fantastic?s diffuse aspects and explore its myriad dimensions. Our encounter with such phenomena will be concentrated on three of its key genres with roots in Asian and Asian-inspired religious movements: gods, ghosts, and gurus. Accordingly, course readings will discuss case studies from Hinduism, Buddhism, Traditional Chinese Religions, Vietnamese Cao ?i, and other such sectarian perspectives. Beyond gaining an empirical understanding of how each of these traditions has interpreted the classifications of god, ghost, and guru, we will also consider how religious practitioners have articulated their ideas about these entities in storytelling, visual objects, cinematic productions and other arenas of cultural expression. Overall, these inquiries will encourage students to critically engage with the following question: ?How can studies of Fantastical Figures affirm and expand conventional notions of religion?? (ASIAN-RL)
Distribution Requirements: (ALC-AS), (CA-AG, LA-AG)
Last Four Terms Offered: Fall 2025
Schedule of Classes (https://classes.cornell.edu/)

RELST 2298 - The Epic of Rama: The Ramayana and its place in Indian Cultural History (3 Credits)
Crosslisted with ASIAN 2298
Valmiki's Sanskrit epic Ramayana occupies a pivotal role in India's religious and literary history. Its central hero, the divine prince Rama, came to be seen both as model for political virtue and an ideal object of religious devotion, while the poem itself became the archetypal model for later poets. In this course we will read extensively from Valmiki's epic, as well as several later literary and dramatic adaptations, and conidier broadly the role of the Ramayana in the shaping of Indian culture. We will also view samples of film, television and comic-book versions. (ASIAN-RL)
Distribution Requirements: (ALC-AS)
Schedule of Classes (https://classes.cornell.edu/)

RELST 2299 - Buddhism (3 Credits)
Crosslisted with ASIAN 2299
This course will explore the Buddhist tradition from its origins in ancient India to its migrations throughout Asia and eventually to the West. The first part of the course will deal with Indian Buddhism: the Buddha, the principal teachings and practices of his early followers, and new developments in spiritual orientation. We will then turn to the transmission of Buddhism to Sri Lanka and Southeast Asia, where at least one of the early schools has been preserved. Next we will look at Mahayana Buddhism as it moves north and east, encompassing China, Japan, and Tibet. While much of the course will be devoted to developments in traditional times, we will also look at some of the ways Buddhist cultures have responded to modernity. (ASIAN-RL)
Distribution Requirements: (CA-AG, HA-AG), (GLC-AS, HST-AS)
Exploratory Studies: (EAAREA, SAAREA)

Last Four Terms Offered: Fall 2026, Fall 2024, Fall 2023, Fall 2021
Schedule of Classes (https://classes.cornell.edu/)

RELST 2322 - Black Religion and Pop Culture (3 Credits)
Crosslisted with ASRC 2322, AMST 2322
This course uses art and popular culture to provide a dynamic view of Black religion in the United States and the Diaspora throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Discussion topics include: religiosity in the visual art of Kara Walker, P-Valley's Hoodoo representation, and James Baldwin's Black Sanctified aesthetics. By engaging broadly with visual art, film, music, and television, students will gain a sense of the various religious and spiritual traditions that pervade contemporary popular culture and gain the ability to think critically about how religious themes show up on television, in music, and in the world around them.
Distribution Requirements: (ALC-AS), (CA-AG, LA-AG)
Last Four Terms Offered: Spring 2025
Schedule of Classes (https://classes.cornell.edu/)

RELST 2345 - Jerusalem: The Holy City (3 Credits)
Crosslisted with NES 2345, JWST 2345, MEDVL 2345, ARKEO 2345
In this class, students are introduced to the broad scope of the city of Jerusalem's political and religious history from its origins until today. Some topics the class covers include: the Jebusite origins of the city; the rise of kings David and Solomon; the Second Temple and Temple Mount; the life of Jesus in and around Jerusalem; Byzantine Jerusalem; the life of Muhammad in Jerusalem; the Crusades; the Ottoman era; archaeological sites; and the status of Jerusalem today. In addition to reading several broad accounts of the history of the city, students perform close readings of a range of primary sources, from the Hebrew Bible, New Testament, the Qur'an, travelogues, pilgrimage narratives, geographers, letters, poetry and short stories, archaeological studies, among many others. Throughout the semester, students will discuss questions about identity-formation, sacred space, memory, myth, and pilgrimage.
Distribution Requirements: (ALC-AS, HST-AS)
Exploratory Studies: (CU-ITL)

Schedule of Classes (https://classes.cornell.edu/)

RELST 2515 - Anthropology of Iran (3 Credits)
Crosslisted with NES 2515, ANTHR 2415, SHUM 2515
This course explores the major debates that define the study of contemporary Iran. Drawing from ethnographic works, literary criticism, intellectual histories and more, we will examine historical events and cultural developments from a diverse set of theoretical approaches. Topics include the Iranian revolution in comparative perspective, the Iran-Iraq war and its continued legacy, media forms and practice, contemporary film and literature, women's movements, youth culture, religious diversity, legal systems, techniques of governance, and more. Of particular interest will be the intersections of religion and secularism in Iranian society. Ultimately, it is the objective of the course to explore the diverse cultural, political, and material worlds that shape collective life and individual subjectivity in Iran today.
Distribution Requirements: (CA-AG, D-AG), (GLC-AS, SCD-AS)
Exploratory Studies: (CU-ITL)

Last Four Terms Offered: Fall 2023, Fall 2020, Fall 2018
Schedule of Classes (https://classes.cornell.edu/)

RELST 2533 - Spain to Seixas:Jews, Judaisms, and Early Modern Europe (3 Credits)
Crosslisted with JWST 2533, MEDVL 2533
Immerse yourself in the essential Jewish movers and moments of Early Modern Europe. Catch the usual headlines (Expulsion! Atheism! Finance!) and headliners like Spinoza, Tzvi, or Baal Shem Tov. Stay tuned for hot, new bangers like Anusa's Columbus, a Yid? or retro-pop classics like MHRL's Golem. You'll be transported from medieval Spain to the revolutionary Americas as you discover the Hebrews, Shebrews, and Theybrews who made modernity.
Distribution Requirements: (ALC-AS, HST-AS)
Exploratory Studies: (CU-ITL)

Schedule of Classes (https://classes.cornell.edu/)

RELST 2540 - Zionism and Its Discontents (3 Credits)
Crosslisted with NES 2540, JWST 2540, GOVT 2545
This course examines the history of Zionism as an idea and as a political movement in all its various forms, currents, and transformations from its origins in mid-nineteenth century Europe to the present. Despite its success in establishing the State of Israel in 1948, Zionism, which also sought to normalize Jewish collective life and provide a safe haven from persecution for the Jews, has encountered multiple challenges from within and without. Some continue to think of it as the national liberation movement of the Jewish people while others regard it is a Western inspired colonial project. Originating largely as a radical rejection of both traditional Jewish religious life and the Jews' diaspora in favor of modern nationalism, since 1967 Zionism has witnessed religious-nationalist fervor and a Jewish diaspora increasingly interested in or disinterested with the state of Israel. The course also considers the phenomenon of post-Zionism in Israeli historiography as well as Zionism's difficulty in coming to terms with the idea and reality that two peoples rather than one live in the land west of the Jordan. We'll also consider the Palestinian response framed as Zionism from the standpoint of its victims.
Distribution Requirements: (CA-AG), (GLC-AS)
Exploratory Studies: (CU-ITL)

Last Four Terms Offered: Fall 2023, Spring 2016
Schedule of Classes (https://classes.cornell.edu/)

RELST 2546 - South Asian Religions in Practice: The Healing Traditions (3 Credits)
Crosslisted with ANTHR 2546, ASIAN 2254
This course offers an anthropological approach to the study of religious traditions and practices in South Asia: India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, and Nepal. The course begins with a short survey of the major religious traditions of South Asia: Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, Sikhism, and Islam. We look to the development of these traditions through historical and cultural perspectives. The course then turns to the modern period, considering the impact of colonialism, nationalism, and globalization upon religious ideologies and practices. The primary focus of the course will be the ethnographic study of contemporary religious practices in the region. We examine phenomena such as ritual, pilgrimage, possession, devotionalism, monasticism, asceticism, and revivalism through a series of ethnographic case studies. In so doing, we also seek to understand the impact of politics, modernity, diasporic movement, social inequality, changing gender roles, and mass mediation upon these traditions and practices. (ASIAN-RL)
Distribution Requirements: (ALC-AS, SCD-AS), (CA-AG, D-AG, LA-AG)
Exploratory Studies: (SAAREA)

Last Four Terms Offered: Fall 2026, Spring 2025, Spring 2024, Fall 2021
Schedule of Classes (https://classes.cornell.edu/)

RELST 2555 - Sex and Sexuality in Islam (3 Credits)
Crosslisted with NES 2555, FGSS 2555, MEDVL 2555
This course will introduce students to the study of sex and sexuality in the medieval and early modern Islamic World, ending at the dawn of the twentieth century; we will begin with the study of desire in pre-Islamic and early-Islamic poetry and end with the study of the impact of colonialism on the family, the home and morality across the Islamic world. Students will read (in English) from the Qur'an, the sayings of the Prophet Muhammad, obscene and chaste poetry, erotological works, medical treatises, moral condemnations of sex, legal case studies, erotic stories and travel literature. Students will also engage with modern scholarship on the history of sex and sexuality in the Islamic world. Major topics of study will include: the composition of the family across time and space, the intersection between slavery and sexuality, homosexuality and homoerotic desire in the premodern world, marriage and adultery, questions of consent and sexual violence in law and storytelling, and the discrepancies between law, morality and social practice.
Distribution Requirements: (ALC-AS, SCD-AS), (CA-AG, D-AG, LA-AG)
Exploratory Studies: (CU-ITL)

Last Four Terms Offered: Spring 2025
Schedule of Classes (https://classes.cornell.edu/)

RELST 2599 - Medicine, Magic and Science in the Ancient Near East (3 Credits)
Crosslisted with NES 2599, JWST 2599, BSOC 2599
This course explores the history of medicine and other sciences in the ancient Near East, broadly defined. In addition to medicine, the other scientific disciplines covered in this course include mathematics, astrology, astronomy, alchemy, zoology, among others. Geographically, the course traces the transmission of scientific knowledge in ancient Babylonia, Iran, Egypt, Israel, Turkey, and beyond. As such, the course offers students a tour of different ancient civilizations and corpora. Students read selections from cuneiform Akkadian tablets, Egyptian Christian Coptic spellbooks, rabbinic sources such as the Talmud, among many other works. At the same time, students will be required to critically engage recent scholarship in the history of science and medicine as a way to help frame their analyses of the ancient materials. The course interrogates how ancient civilizations transmitted and received scientific knowledge, as well as the relationship between what we today tend to call science, medicine, magic, and religion. This course is intended not only for students in the Humanities and Social Sciences, but also for those majoring in science or medicine.
Distribution Requirements: (HA-AG), (HST-AS)
Exploratory Studies: (CU-ITL)

Last Four Terms Offered: Fall 2026, Spring 2026, Fall 2024, Spring 2024
Schedule of Classes (https://classes.cornell.edu/)

RELST 2603 - Demons in Buddhism (3 Credits)
Crosslisted with ASIAN 2503
Contrary to the conventionally portrayed image of Buddhism as a peaceful, benign, and nonviolent religion, Buddhist traditions across Asia have long been populated by demons, ghosts, and wrathful deities. This course explores the many faces of the demonic in Buddhism, from Mara—the tempter who sought to prevent the Buddha's enlightenment—to hungry ghosts in the Buddhist purgatory, and fearsome guardian deities of Tantric Buddhism. Through texts, rituals, visual culture, and popular media, students will examine how Buddhists categorized, confronted, transformed, and sometimes worshipped demonic beings. We will ask what kinds of ethical qualities Buddhists associate with demons, what practices are invented to engage them, and how demonic figures have served not only as a means of identifying religious others but also as a mirror reflecting the anger, desire, and ignorance that Buddhism locates within humans themselves. (ASIAN-RL)
Distribution Requirements: (ALC-AS)
Schedule of Classes (https://classes.cornell.edu/)

RELST 2627 - Introduction to Islam (3 Credits)
Crosslisted with NES 2627, MEDVL 2627, HIST 2627
This course is an introduction to the study of Islam and Islamic history. Organised historically, the lecture series will begin with the career of the Prophet Muhammad, before charting the course of the Islamic Conquests, the establishment, zenith and collapse of various Islamic Empires, ending with European colonialism. Along the way, this geopolitical and historical overview will provide a backdrop to our exploration of changes and developments in Islamic thought and practice. In particular, we will focus on the emergence of the Sunni-Shi'i conflict, the rise of Sufism and Salafism, as well as how scholars across time and space thought and wrote about questions of ideal Islamic governance, the religious authority of the caliph, women's role in society and public space, slavery, the ethics of living under non-Muslim rule and the place of non-Muslims in Islamic society. (HIST-HGS)
Distribution Requirements: (D-AG, HA-AG), (HST-AS, SCD-AS)
Exploratory Studies: (CU-ITL)

Last Four Terms Offered: Fall 2026, Fall 2025, Fall 2024
Schedule of Classes (https://classes.cornell.edu/)

RELST 2629 - New Testament-Early Christian Literatures (3 Credits)
Crosslisted with NES 2629, CLASS 2613, JWST 2629
This course provides a literary and historical introduction to the earliest Christian writings, especially those that eventually came to be included in the New Testament. Through the lens of the Gospel narratives and earliest Christian letters, especially those of Paul, we will explore the rich diversity of the early Christian movement from its Jewish roots in first-century Palestine through its development and spread to Asia Minor and beyond. We will give careful consideration to the political, economic, social, cultural, and religious circumstances that gave rise to the Jesus movement, as well as those that facilitated the emergence of various manifestations of Christian belief and practice. The course will address themes like identity and ethnicity, conversion and debate, race and slavery, gender and sexuality, and the connections between politics and religion.
Distribution Requirements: (ALC-AS, HST-AS), (CA-AG, HA-AG, LA-AG)
Exploratory Studies: (CU-ITL)

Last Four Terms Offered: Spring 2026, Spring 2020, Spring 2018, Fall 2015
Schedule of Classes (https://classes.cornell.edu/)

RELST 2630 - Religion and Reason (3 Credits)
Crosslisted with PHIL 2530
What must (or could) God be like, and what reasons do we have for thinking that a being of that sort actually exists? What difference would (or could) the existence of God make to our lives? Religion & Reason examines the idea, shared by several major world religions, that God must be an absolutely perfect being. What attributes must a perfect being have: must it have a mind, be a person, care for human beings? Is the concept of a perfect being coherent? Is the existence of a perfect being compatible with the presence of evil in the world, the existence of human freedom, the nature of the world as modern science understands it? Does what is morally right and wrong depend in any important way on the nature or will of a perfect being? Is a perfect being among the things that actually inhabit our universe? The course approaches these questions with the tools and methods of philosophical reason and through readings drawn from both classic texts and contemporary philosophical discussion.
Distribution Requirements: (ALC-AS, ETM-AS), (CA-AG, KCM-AG, LA-AG)
Exploratory Studies: (EUAREA)

Last Four Terms Offered: Fall 2026, Spring 2025, Spring 2024, Fall 2022
Schedule of Classes (https://classes.cornell.edu/)

RELST 2644 - Introduction to Judaism (3 Credits)
Crosslisted with NES 2644, JWST 2644
This course is an introduction to Jewish identities, values, and practices from the ancient to modern era. Organized thematically, it examines Judaism as a religious phenomenon, with a particular emphasis on its cultural and textual diversity across three millennia. Themes covered include creation, Sabbath, prayer, Jerusalem, pious customs, magic, reincarnation, revelation, among others. Throughout the semester students perform close readings of a wide selection of Jewish texts from the Bible, Talmud, kabbalah (mysticism), philosophy, liturgy, and modern Jewish thought. In what ways are these various traditions of Judaism interrelated and/or in tension with one another? In the face of the Jewish history's tremendous diversity, what is it that has unified Judaism and the Jewish people over the centuries? By exploring these types of questions, this course examines the appropriateness of defining Judaism as a religion, an ethnicity, a civilization, and/or a culture. Readings include introductory-level textbooks and essays, as well as a range of primary source materials in translation.
Distribution Requirements: (ALC-AS, HST-AS), (CA-AG, HA-AG, LA-AG)
Exploratory Studies: (CU-ITL)

Last Four Terms Offered: Spring 2026, Spring 2025, Spring 2024, Spring 2023
Schedule of Classes (https://classes.cornell.edu/)

RELST 2656 - Anti-Judaism and Anti-Semitism in Historical Perspective (3 Credits)
Crosslisted with HIST 2656, JWST 2156
Why is it that the age of emancipation which saw most of the world's Jews gain citizenship status and achieve unprecedented levels of socio-economic modernization, also witnessed a catastrophic assault on Jewish life? How do we explain the conjunction between the spread of liberal values and the exponential rise of anti-semitism? Most historians refer to the virulence of racism in accounting for the scale and brutality of anti-Jewish rhetoric which prepared the way for the destruction of European Jewry in the twentieth century. But this explanation fails to account for the fact that progressive democratic discourse which explicitly endorses ethnic diversity and emphatically repudiates racial prejudice remains susceptible to anti-Jewish animus even now. In this class, we will examine the complex relationship between emancipation and anti-semitism from the perspective of those who benefited from the former but had to contend with the reality of the latter - Europe's rising class of Jewish intellectuals. We will discover that their insights into the problem of modern Jew-hatred were both acute and prescient and have much to teach us about the current Jewish predicament. (HIST-HEU, HIST-HPE)
Distribution Requirements: (D-AG, HA-AG), (HST-AS, SCD-AS)
Last Four Terms Offered: Spring 2025
Schedule of Classes (https://classes.cornell.edu/)

RELST 2666 - Apocalypse! (3 Credits)
Crosslisted with NES 2666, ARKEO 2666, JWST 2666, MEDVL 2666
For thousands of years, people have believed that the world is ending imminently. In this course, we will examine the roots of apocalyptic thinking in the ancient world, especially among Jews and Christians. We will look at biblical apocalyptic texts as well as a wide array of other apocalyptic literatures, such as the books of Enoch, the Sibylline Oracles, 4 Ezra, the Apocalypse of Adam, the Apocalypse of Paul, and many others. These texts contain visions of end times, journeys to heaven and hell, and dramatic images of angels and demons, war and peace, and the natural and supernatural worlds. Our goal is to understand the circumstances that gave rise to apocalypticism and how disaster-thinking may have, paradoxically, provided comfort during crises. Throughout the course, we will pay close attention to the meaning of apocalypse as revelation, an unveiling, a discovery. (ARKEO-COS, ARKEO-RMNE)
Distribution Requirements: (ALC-AS, HST-AS), (CA-AG, HA-AG, LA-AG)
Last Four Terms Offered: Fall 2025, Fall 2019, Fall 2016, Spring 2014
Schedule of Classes (https://classes.cornell.edu/)

RELST 2722 - Of Saints, Poets, and Revolutionaries: Medieval and Modern Iran and Central Asia (3 Credits)
Crosslisted with NES 2722, ASIAN 2294, MEDVL 2722
From the poet-kings of medieval Persia to the trading networks of the famed ?Silk Road? to the wandering mystics of Herat to the constitutional revolution of Iran to the colonial and post-colonial occupations of contemporary Afghanistan, this course offers a broad cultural and political history of Iranian and Turkic Central Asia. In addition, we will explore the highly complex intellectual, artistic, and architectural trends and ?cross-cultural? exchanges that formed the backbone of many disparate Iranian-Turkic cultures. (ASIAN-SC)
Distribution Requirements: (D-AG, HA-AG), (HST-AS, SCD-AS)
Exploratory Studies: (SAAREA)

Last Four Terms Offered: Fall 2026, Spring 2024, Fall 2022, Spring 2020
Schedule of Classes (https://classes.cornell.edu/)

RELST 2724 - Conflict and Coexistence in the Jewish Bible-Old Testament (3 Credits)
Crosslisted with NES 2724, JWST 2724
The Hebrew Bible (Old Testament) is a repository of ancient Israelite religious, political, social, historical, and literary traditions. For the modern reader these ancient traditions are often obscured by a focus on the text as revelation. The purpose of this course is to introduce students to the biblical world by reading the Hebrew Bible in translation, on its own terms, as a body of literature that evolved in an ancient Near Eastern context. The Bible itself will be the primary text for the course, but students will also be exposed to the rich and diverse textual traditions of the ancient Near East, including Mesopotamia, Egypt, Moab, and Ugarit. In addition, this course will explore the impact of early biblical interpretation on shaping the monotheistic traditions inherited in the West. As participants in a secular course on the Bible, students will be challenged to question certain cultural assumptions about the composition and authorship of the Bible, and will be expected to differentiate between a text's content and its presumed meaning.
Distribution Requirements: (ALC-AS, HST-AS), (CA-AG, HA-AG, LA-AG)
Exploratory Studies: (CU-ITL)

Last Four Terms Offered: Fall 2025, Fall 2024, Fall 2023, Fall 2022
Schedule of Classes (https://classes.cornell.edu/)

RELST 2727 - The Queer Middle East (3 Credits)
Crosslisted with NES 2727, MEDVL 2727, HIST 2727
What does it mean to be queer in the Middle East? How do queer Muslims and Arabs navigate their sexuality around contemporary legal barriers to same-sex sexual intercourse and social disapprobation? How do the sexual and emotional lives of contemporary queer Muslims and Arabs differ or resemble the lives of people in the pre-modern period? Taking students from the dawn of Islam to the current day, this course charts the history of sex, sexuality, the family and queerness in the Middle East. Along the way, students will learn about Islamic legal and scriptural approaches to sexuality, the importance of sexuality to the propagation of colonialism and empire, post-colonial approaches to sexuality and sexual difference and beyond. (HIST-HGS)
Distribution Requirements: (HST-AS, SCD-AS)
Exploratory Studies: (CU-ITL)

Schedule of Classes (https://classes.cornell.edu/)

RELST 2770 - Islam and Gender (3 Credits)
Crosslisted with NES 2770, MEDVL 2770, FGSS 2770, ANTHR 2470, LGBT 2770
This course explores the role of gender and sexuality in shaping the lives of Muslims past and present. Through a close examination of ethnographies, intellectual histories, and religious treatises, we will analyze the key debates and discourses surrounding the intersection of gender and Islam. We begin by investigating Quranic revelations and hadith concerning gender and sexual ethics, female figures of emulation in early Islam, and feminist exegeses of the Quran. Continuing onward, we focus upon the everyday lives of Muslim women and non-binary individuals in medieval, colonial, and post-colonial contexts, highlighting the ways in which people negotiate and respond to the sexual politics of the times in which they live as we ask what, if anything, is specifically Islamic about the situations under discussion? Following this, we embark upon a history of sexuality within Islam, tracing the ways in which the categories of homosexuality and heterosexuality came to exist in the Muslim world, as well as the history and positionality of trans communities past and present. We then continue with an exploration of Islamic feminism as it exists today, looking to the ways in which Muslim feminists have critically engaged both religious texts as well as Western feminist theory. Finally, the course concludes by analyzing the relationship between the study of Islam, gender, and empire.
Distribution Requirements: (CA-AG, D-AG), (D-HA), (GLC-AS, SCD-AS)
Exploratory Studies: (CU-ITL)

Last Four Terms Offered: Fall 2025, Spring 2023, Fall 2019
Schedule of Classes (https://classes.cornell.edu/)

RELST 2772 - Body and Spirit in Ancient Egypt (3 Credits)
Crosslisted with NES 2772, ANTHR 2772, ARKEO 2772
Did ancient Egyptians believe in the existence of souls? Why did they mummify the dead? Was the body of a pharaoh different from that of an ordinary person? This course sets the famous mortuary practices of ancient Egypt alongside treatments of living bodies and their immaterial components. We will read translated excerpts from ancient Egyptian texts?from magical spells recited for ancestors, to poetry on sex and death?while learning about items taken to the grave and monuments set up for posterity. In the process, we will reflect on contemporary representations of the past and evaluate the assumptions behind modern treatments of ancient artifacts and human remains. (ARKEO-RMNE)
Distribution Requirements: (ALC-AS, HST-AS), (CA-AG, HA-AG, LA-AG)
Exploratory Studies: (CU-ITL)

Last Four Terms Offered: Fall 2026, Fall 2025
Schedule of Classes (https://classes.cornell.edu/)

RELST 2852 - Judaism and the Origins of Christianity (3 Credits)
Crosslisted with HIST 2852, JWST 2852
Most people think of Christianity as the daughter religion of Judaism. In this course, we will see that what we now know as Judaism and Christianity both claimed ownership of the same textual tradition and emerged together from the same set of historical circumstances, shaped by political crisis, a radical transformation of the social order and the challenge of Graeco-Roman culture. Through close reading of the principal sources of Christian literature, such as Paul's letters to the first communities of gentile believers and the accounts of the life and death of the messiah, known collectively as the gospels, we will explore how and why the followers of Jesus first came to think of themselves as the New Israel and how a polemical engagement with their controversial interpretation of Hebrew prophecy shaped the development of the rabbinic movement in Roman Palestine. (HIST-HEU, HIST-HPE)
Distribution Requirements: (HA-AG), (HST-AS)
Last Four Terms Offered: Fall 2026, Fall 2024, Fall 2020
Schedule of Classes (https://classes.cornell.edu/)

RELST 2853 - The Law in Jewish History (3 Credits)
Crosslisted with HIST 2853, JWST 2853
Before Jewish politics, Jewish identity and Jewish philosophy, there was Jewish law. No other institution is more important to the history of Judaism and to the Jewish way of life. In this lecture course, we will explore the ways in which legal thought and legal discourse shaped Jewish experience and expression between the biblical age and the computer age. We will discover how the cultural meaning of law changed over time, how legal concepts shaped Jewish belief and Jewish behavior, and how the study of Jewish legal sources contributed to the emergence of modern constitutional thought in the Atlantic world. (HIST-HEU, HIST-HPE)
Distribution Requirements: (HA-AG), (HST-AS)
Last Four Terms Offered: Spring 2026, Spring 2022
Schedule of Classes (https://classes.cornell.edu/)

RELST 2952 - The Arts of Hindu Devotion (3 Credits)
Crosslisted with ASIAN 2952
Devotion, or bhakti, has been expressed through art for over one thousand years in Hindu traditions within and beyond South Asia. In this course, students will engage with diverse primary sources for bhakti in both verbal and visual registers. These will include the Bhagavad Gita, poetic hymns of saint-poets, visual representations of gods, temple arts, poster arts, dramatic performance, and film. Students will learn how the history of bhakti relates to that of Hinduism and study its connection to social histories of caste and gender. We will also discuss what happens to devotional art as it crosses the boundaries of nation, culture, and media. (ASIAN-RL)
Distribution Requirements: (ALC-AS)
Schedule of Classes (https://classes.cornell.edu/)

RELST 3023 - Partition: Violence, Citizenship and the Making of Modern South Asia (3 Credits)
Crosslisted with ASIAN 3023
This course examines the Partition of British India as both a historical event and an ongoing process that reshaped the political, social, and legal landscape of modern South Asia. Moving beyond nationalist narratives, it situates Partition within broader debates on nationalism, religion, caste, gender, violence, migration, and citizenship. The course analyzes how India, Pakistan, and later Bangladesh emerged not only through territorial division and war, but also through the management of refugees, the codification of citizenship, and the regulation of social and religious difference. Drawing on historiography, oral testimony, legal documents, and interdisciplinary scholarship, students will investigate how colonial residues and postcolonial imaginaries continue to structure state formation and belonging in the region. We begin by examining how Partition has been narrated, archived, and remembered, asking how history itself is written and contested. We then turn to the lived experience of violence, displacement, caste, and social rupture, tracing how communities were transformed in the moment of division. We then explore how postcolonial states sought to govern difference through refugee policy, constitutional design, citizenship law, and the management of minorities and majorities. Finally, we consider secession, internment, and unresolved conflicts, including those of 1971 and Kashmir, in order to understand the enduring afterlives of Partition in contemporary South Asia. (ASIAN-SC)
Distribution Requirements: (HST-AS)
Last Four Terms Offered: Fall 2026
Schedule of Classes (https://classes.cornell.edu/)

RELST 3049 - History, Theory, and Methods in the Academic Study of Religion (3 Credits)
Crosslisted with ASIAN 3049
This course will explore the development of and variety in the academic discipline of Religious Studies. We will consider the emergence of secular approaches to the study of religion arising out of the European Enlightenment, and more particularly, the methods in the academic study of religion based upon different theoretical approaches. We will be particularly concerned to reflect upon the category of religious experience in modern discourses from historical, social scientific, hermeneutical, and psychological points of view. (ASIAN-RL)
Prerequisites: One course in Religious Studies.
Distribution Requirements: (ALC-AS)
Exploratory Studies: (EAAREA, SAAREA)

Last Four Terms Offered: Fall 2026, Spring 2023, Fall 2020, Fall 2018
Schedule of Classes (https://classes.cornell.edu/)

RELST 3060 - Emotions, Religion, and Race (3 Credits)
Crosslisted with ASRC 3060
This course explores past and contemporary theories of emotions and different kinds of emotions like wonder, grief, anger, and fear, all with an eye toward the study and practice of religion, and its relationship to race, gender, class, and politics. We will also explore how the academic study of religion and different religious tradition impact our understanding of emotions. We will draw from philosophy, anthropology, sociology, literature, political science, affect theory, gender studies, psychology, and neuroscience. We will examine several questions related to emotions and its rise. First and foremost, what is an emotion? How is it different from affect, feeling, or passion? How are emotions investigated across disciplines? Can we study emotion historically? How are certain emotions racialized or gendered? What is a religious experience? How identifying as religious or otherwise impact one's understanding and experience of emotions? How do emotions lend force to ideas and ideologies, to causes such as the recent surge of White (Christian) nationalist sentiment in the U.S. and other countries? Finally, what do emotions (and affect theory) bring to the study of religion?
Distribution Requirements: (ETM-AS, SSC-AS), (KCM-AG, SBA-AG)
Last Four Terms Offered: Fall 2025, Fall 2024
Schedule of Classes (https://classes.cornell.edu/)

RELST 3150 - Medieval Philosophy (3 Credits)
Crosslisted with PHIL 3210, MEDVL 3210
A selective survey of Western philosophical thought from the fourth to the 14th century. Topics include the problem of universals, the theory of knowledge and truth, the nature of free choice and practical reasoning, and philosophical theology. Readings (in translation) include Augustine, Boethius, Anselm, Abelard, Aquinas, Scotus, and Ockham. Some attention will be given to the development of ideas across the period and the influence of non-Western traditions on the West.
Distribution Requirements: (ETM-AS, HST-AS), (HA-AG, KCM-AG)
Exploratory Studies: (EUAREA)

Last Four Terms Offered: Spring 2026, Spring 2024, Spring 2022, Spring 2019
Schedule of Classes (https://classes.cornell.edu/)

RELST 3281 - The Bible as Literature (3 Credits)
Crosslisted with ENGL 3280
A knowledge of the Bible's images, stories and themes is crucial to understanding not only the art and literature of many cultures, but also ancient and contemporary world politics. It is the world's most widely read book and a sacred text of three great religions: Judaism, Islam and Christianity. This course will offer students an introduction to the Bible's major historical, anthropological and literary contexts. Students will learn about the Bible's literary divisions and its main stories and characters as well as its ideas about faith, salvation, history and the end of time. We will use the New Oxford Annotated Bible for all course work. (ENGL-PRE)
Distribution Requirements: (ALC-AS, HST-AS), (CA-AG, HA-AG, LA-AG)
Exploratory Studies: (EUAREA)

Last Four Terms Offered: Spring 2025, Fall 2022, Spring 2020, Fall 2017
Schedule of Classes (https://classes.cornell.edu/)

RELST 3297 - Quranic Stories for Arabic Language Development (3 Credits)
Crosslisted with ARAB 3297
This course introduces students to significant stories in the Quran. It is a language course in which students engage with stories about the prophets, women, righteous people, and animals. The course strengthens all four language skills—reading, writing, listening, and speaking—while building key vocabulary and grammar to help students comprehend and discuss the texts. Students will discuss the stories and related Quranic verses, their interpretation, and the values and lessons learned from them. The content will be mainly in Arabic, supplemented by some English. The course is designed to support Arabic language learning through close reading and discussion of selected texts and welcomes all learners with the appropriate language background.
Prerequisites: ARAB 1203 or permission of instructor.
Distribution Requirements: (ALC-AS, FLOPI-AS), (CA-AG, LA-AG)
Exploratory Studies: (CU-ITL)

Last Four Terms Offered: Fall 2026
Schedule of Classes (https://classes.cornell.edu/)

RELST 3309 - Temple in the World: Buddhism in Contemporary South and Southeast Asia (3 Credits)
Crosslisted with ASIAN 3309
How do Buddhists live out their philosophies and ethics? What are the spaces of ritual, devotion, meditation, education, and politics? How do Buddhist practices and affiliations satisfy aesthetic and emotional needs and build social networks? Working with textual and visual materials, including video clips and longer films, this course explores the unfolding of Buddhist life in 20th- and 21st-century South and Southeast Asia, in locations such as Burma/Myanmar, Thailand, India, Sri Lanka, Malaysia, Vietnam, and Cambodia. (ASIAN-RL)
Distribution Requirements: (CA-AG), (GLC-AS)
Exploratory Studies: (SAAREA, SEAREA)

Last Four Terms Offered: Spring 2023, Fall 2021, Fall 2020, Spring 2019
Schedule of Classes (https://classes.cornell.edu/)

RELST 3319 - From Meditation to Mat, Cave to Cartoon: Yoga as Philosophy, Practice, and Public Performance (3 Credits)
Crosslisted with ASIAN 3319
Fitness. Flexibility. Relaxation. Spirituality. These are just a sampling of the many buzzwords associated with groups of allied practices like Yoga, Meditation, and Mindfulness that have contemplative and physical dimensions. With mythologized origins among communities of obscure holy men living in the mountains of South Asia, yoga-centered traditions are now part of a multi-billion-dollar global industry, endorsed by celebrities and everyday people alike. In fact, statistics show that at least 1 out of 6 Americans today performs some kind of regular yoga routine. Indeed, the image of the proverbial yoga practitioner has been so influential on American public life, that at least two popular cultural icons from the past century, a baseball player and a cartoon character, have borne the first name Yogi. This course examines the evolution of yogic systems across three key historical periods?the classical, colonial, and contemporary?and offers students new perspectives on how activities that originated or stemmed from religious practice have acquired new meanings and objectives. Our approach will allow us to investigate both the continuities and disruptions within yogic philosophies from ancient times to the present. It will also allow us to assess how yoga-related concepts intersect in present times with notions of spiritual liberation, health and wellness, capitalist success, and racial justice. (ASIAN-RL)
Distribution Requirements: (ALC-AS), (CA-AG, LA-AG)
Exploratory Studies: (SAAREA)

Last Four Terms Offered: Spring 2026
Schedule of Classes (https://classes.cornell.edu/)

RELST 3322 - Gospel and The Blues: A Black Women's History I, 1900-1973 (3 Credits)
Crosslisted with ASRC 3322, FGSS 3322, MUSIC 3322, AMST 3322
In her pathbreaking text Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments: Intimate Histories of Social Upheaval Saidiya Hartman writes that young Black women were radical thinkers who tirelessly imagined other ways to live and never failed to consider how the world might be otherwise. This two-semester course endeavors to travel through those worlds using the cultural and musical forms of gospel and the blues as our compass. The first semester is guided by the work of scholars and writers like Angela Davis, Hazel Carby, Alice Walker, and Gayl Jones and artists like Ethel Waters, Bessie Smith, Victoria Spivey, and Sister Rosetta Tharpe. Together we will interrogate the spectrum of lived experiences making for a kaleidoscopic sonic history of joy, pleasure, sorrow, resistance, and everything in between. (MUSIC-HC)
Prerequisites: ASRC 1500 or ASRC 1932.
Distribution Requirements: (ALC-AS), (CA-AG, LA-AG)
Last Four Terms Offered: Spring 2026, Fall 2024
Schedule of Classes (https://classes.cornell.edu/)

RELST 3331 - Opt Out, Tune In: Hermits, Pilgrims and Dharma Bums, from East Asia to Ithaca (3 Credits)
Crosslisted with ASIAN 3331
This course explores the intentional removal of oneself from society as expressed in East Asian Buddhist literature, through the acts of hermits and pilgrims. We read the diaries, essays, autobiographies, and poetry of recluse monks and nuns from China, Korea and Japan, and the musings of pilgrims through the ages in these countries, with special attention to Japan. Last, we examine how the actions of many of these writers influenced the American counter-culture movement in the 1960?s and into the present. We inquire what light these writings can shed on ?the great resignation? of recent years, and ?quiet quitting? as a response to late capitalism, ecosystem collapse and climate change and social upheaval in our current times. Many of the figures we read were directly critiquing social excess and materialism, and these writings offer surprising assessments of our current age. (ASIAN-RL)
Distribution Requirements: (ETM-AS), (KCM-AG)
Exploratory Studies: (CU-SBY); (EAAREA)

Last Four Terms Offered: Fall 2026, Spring 2024, Spring 2023
Schedule of Classes (https://classes.cornell.edu/)

RELST 3341 - Mahayana Buddhism (3 Credits)
Crosslisted with ASIAN 3341
This course will explore the origins and early developments of a movement in Indian Buddhism known as the Great Vehicle. We will intensively examine a small slice of this movement?s voluminous literature so as to better understand its call for a new spiritual orientation within Buddhism. Topics of discussion will include the career of the bodhisattva, the lay/monk distinction, attitudes of Mahayanists toward women and other Buddhists, and the development of Buddhist utopias and transcendent buddhas. (ASIAN-RL)
Distribution Requirements: (ALC-AS), (CA-AG, LA-AG)
Exploratory Studies: (EAAREA, SAAREA)

Last Four Terms Offered: Spring 2025, Spring 2022, Spring 2020, Spring 2018
Schedule of Classes (https://classes.cornell.edu/)

RELST 3344 - Introduction to Indian Philosophy (3 Credits)
Crosslisted with ASIAN 3344, CLASS 3674, PHIL 2540
This course will survey the rich and sophisticated tradition of Indian philosophical thought from its beginnings in the speculations of Upanishads, surveying debates between Hindus, Buddhists, Jains and materialistic philosophers about the existence and nature of God and of the human soul, the nature of knowledge, and the theory of language. (ASIAN-RL)
Distribution Requirements: (ETM-AS), (KCM-AG)
Exploratory Studies: (SAAREA)

Last Four Terms Offered: Spring 2026, Fall 2023, Spring 2022, Spring 2019
Schedule of Classes (https://classes.cornell.edu/)

RELST 3420 - Myth, Ritual, and Symbol (3 Credits)
Crosslisted with ANTHR 3420
This course approaches the study of religion, symbols, and myth from an anthropological perspective. The centrality and universality of religion and myth-making in social and symbolic life has been fundamental in the development of cultural theory. Our aim is to understand with this is so. We begin by examining the classic theories of religion in the works of Durkheim, Marx, Weber, Mauss, and Freud, among others, followed by an exploration of how these theories have been influential in anthropological studies of symbolism, cosmology, ritual, selfhood, myth, sorcery, witchcraft, and pilgrimage. We conclude by examining the apparent persistence, revival and transformation of religious and magical beliefs and practices within modern, modernizing, and postcolonial states. We ask whether an increasing politicization and globalization of religious ideology through technological mediation poses significant challenges to the anthropological analysis of religion. In so doing, we also try to understand better the human experience of and identification with the spiritual, mythical, and religious in the contemporary moment. This, in turn, leads us to investigate the inherent volatility of such identifications and experiences within the larger national and global framework of cultural politics.
Distribution Requirements: (ALC-AS, SCD-AS), (CA-AG, D-AG, LA-AG)
Exploratory Studies: (EAAREA, SAAREA, SEAREA)

Last Four Terms Offered: Spring 2026, Spring 2023, Spring 2021, Spring 2020
Schedule of Classes (https://classes.cornell.edu/)

RELST 3422 - Gospel and The Blues: A Black Women's History II, 1973-2023 (3 Credits)
Crosslisted with ASRC 3422, AMST 3422
In her pathbreaking text Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments: Intimate Histories of Social Upheaval Saidiya Hartman writes that young Black women were radical thinkers who tirelessly imagined other ways to live and never failed to consider how the world might be otherwise. This two-semester course endeavors to travel through those worlds using the cultural and musical forms of gospel and the blues as our compass. The second semester is guided by the work of scholars and writers like Maureen Mahon, Marla Frederick, Lynee Denise, and Deesha Philyaw and artists like the Clark Sisters, Aretha Franklin, Toni Braxton, and Beyonce. Together we will interrogate the spectrum of lived experiences making for a kaleidoscopic sonic history of joy, pleasure, sorrow, resistance, and everything in between.
Distribution Requirements: (ALC-AS), (CA-AG, LA-AG)
Last Four Terms Offered: Spring 2025
Schedule of Classes (https://classes.cornell.edu/)

RELST 3448 - Islamic Mysticism (3 Credits)
Crosslisted with NES 3448, HIST 3448, MEDVL 3448, SHUM 3448
Sufism, popularly understood as Islamic mysticism, is a loose name given to a broad and diverse collection of beliefs, practices and groups that range and vary across time and space. Going from a small and largely secretive group of mystical practitioners to a mainstream form of piety in the late medieval period, Sufism has a fascinating history, filled with intrigue, controversy, conflict and interesting characters. In this course, students will delve deep into the history of Sufism and read widely from across the Sufi and anti-Sufi traditions. Concentration will be given to practical questions of how Sufis saw themselves and their relationship to God and the world, how they built mystic community, spurned or embraced family life, interacted with mainstream society, and engaged in controversial erotic practices. Across the course, we will read Sufi histories and biographies, poetry, introductory treatises, as well as anti-Sufi polemics and stories. (HIST-HGS, HIST-HPE)
Distribution Requirements: (ALC-AS, HST-AS), (CA-AG, HA-AG, LA-AG)
Exploratory Studies: (CU-ITL)

Last Four Terms Offered: Spring 2026, Spring 2025
Schedule of Classes (https://classes.cornell.edu/)

RELST 3455 - The Narrative Artistry of the Hebrew Bible (3 Credits)
Crosslisted with NES 3455, JWST 3455
This seminar will engage in a serious of close readings of select narrative texts (in translation) from the Hebrew Bible with a focus on literary techniques and aesthetic values informing their composition. Participants will be expected to study the text carefully in advance of each meeting and come to class prepared to discuss how the text means.
Distribution Requirements: (ALC-AS)
Exploratory Studies: (CU-ITL)

Schedule of Classes (https://classes.cornell.edu/)

RELST 3523 - Antisemitism, Islamophobia, Racism (3 Credits)
Crosslisted with NES 3523, JWST 3523
Islamophobia and Judeophobia are ideas and like all ideas they have a history of their own. Although today many might think of Islamophobia or Judeophobia as unchangeable---fear of and hatred for Islam and Muslims or Judaism and Jews---these ideas and the social and political practices informed by them have varied greatly over time and place. They even intersected during the Middle Age and in Ottoman times when "the Jew" was frequently represented as allied with "The Muslim". The first part of this course traces the history, trajectory, and political agency of Judeophobia and Islamophobia in texts and other forms of culture from late antiquity through the present. The second part of the course is devoted to modernity and the present especially in Europe and the United States focusing on representational practices---how Muslims/Islam and Jews/Judaism are portrayed in various discourses including the media, film and on the internet. We will investigate how these figures (the Muslim, the Jew) serve as a prism through which we can understand various social, political and cultural processes and the interests of those who produce and consume them.
Distribution Requirements: (D-AG, HA-AG), (D-HA), (HST-AS, SCD-AS)
Last Four Terms Offered: Spring 2026, Spring 2025
Schedule of Classes (https://classes.cornell.edu/)

RELST 3530 - A Mediterranean Society and Its Culture (3 Credits)
Crosslisted with NES 3530, JWST 3530, MEDVL 3530
This course examines the cultural and historical interaction of Muslims and Jews from the emergence of Islam in the seventh century through the classical age of Islam down to the turn of the thirteenth century. The intersection of the two cultures (scriptural, spiritual, intellectual, literary, communal, and interpersonal) and members of their respective religious communities will be studied through readings of primary texts (in translation). The course will conclude with some brief reflections on historical memory and the modern and contemporary significance of the two religious communities' interactions during the classical age of Islam.
Distribution Requirements: (HA-AG), (HST-AS)
Exploratory Studies: (CU-ITL)

Last Four Terms Offered: Spring 2025, Fall 2021
Schedule of Classes (https://classes.cornell.edu/)

RELST 3536 - Religions of Iran (3 Credits)
Crosslisted with NES 3535
This course is an introduction to the religions of Iran from antiquity to the present. For over three millennia, Iran has been a hotbed and intercultural crossroads of religious activity as a result of its incredible ethnic and religious diversity, its many centuries of imperial rule, and its important geographical location between east and west. In this class, students survey the major religions of Iran, with an emphasis on those that originated there, including Zoroastrianism, Manichaeism, Mandaeism, Yezidism, and Bahaism. We will pay particularly close attention to the history of Zoroastrianism, one of the world's oldest religions, whose adherents today, known as Parsis, reside mostly in India and Iran, and around the world. In addition to these native religions, students will also explore the impact that Iranian politics and culture have had on the presence of foreign religions in Iran, including on Judaism, Christianity, and Shi'ite Islam. Through a combination of lectures, secondary readings, and especially the close reading of primary sources in translation, students will not only gain a broad understanding of these religions, but also of Iranian history.
Distribution Requirements: (ALC-AS, HST-AS), (CA-AG, HA-AG, LA-AG)
Exploratory Studies: (SAAREA)

Last Four Terms Offered: Fall 2022
Schedule of Classes (https://classes.cornell.edu/)

RELST 3539 - Islamic Spain: Culture and Society (3 Credits)
Crosslisted with NES 3539, JWST 3539, COML 3340, SPAN 3539, MEDVL 3539
This course examines the culture and society of al-Andalus (Islamic Spain) from 711, when Islam arrived in Iberia, until 1492 and the demise of Nasrid Granada. Through extensive discussion and analysis of Arabic, Latin, and Hebrew primary documents and literary texts of various genres (in translation), the course challenges ideological bases of conventional thinking regarding the social, political, and cultural identity of medieval Spain. Among other things, the class investigates the origins of lyric poetry, the relationships among the various confessional and ethnic communities in al-Andalus and the problems involved in Mozarabic Christian and Andalusi Jewish subcultural adaptations of Andalusi Arabo-Islamic culture.
Distribution Requirements: (HA-AG), (HST-AS)
Exploratory Studies: (CU-ITL); (EUAREA, LAAREA)

Schedule of Classes (https://classes.cornell.edu/)

RELST 3540 - On Paying Attention (3 Credits)
Crosslisted with FREN 3540
In the age of smartphones and social media, it's a cliche to say that the competing claims made on our attention only seem to be multiplying. But a cliche can be true. This course is an opportunity to enact certain practices of attentiveness and concentration, drawing largely from religious, literary, artistic, philosophical sources. We'll be trying to slow down our normal critical processes, to suspend the appropriative, pragmatic, and goal-oriented nature of much of the modern university. Through various exercises, from memorizing poems to immersing ourselves in our surroundings to reading about the ways in which our senses reach out to the world, we'll try to make ourselves more attentively available to that world.
Distribution Requirements: (ETM-AS), (KCM-AG)
Last Four Terms Offered: Spring 2025, Fall 2021, Fall 2017, Fall 2016
Schedule of Classes (https://classes.cornell.edu/)

RELST 3550 - Origins of Monotheism (3 Credits)
Crosslisted with NES 3550, JWST 3550, ARKEO 3550
The Purpose of this course is to trace the development of Monotheism from its origins in Israelite/Canaanite polytheism. We will examine worship of the God, Yahweh and other deities in ancient Israel, and will trace the long and complicated process by which Yahweh became the sole deity to be formally accepted within Judaism. Using biblical evidence as well as inscriptional and archaeological evidence from Israel and elsewhere in the ancient Near East, we will address the question of why the Israelites eventually rejected deities such as Baal, Asherah, El and others, and how imagery associated with these deities informs biblical descriptions of Yahweh. We will explore the ways in which a small group of Jerusalem elites helped shape the monotheistic tradition that has been inherited in the West, and will consider the political, social and theological implications of this transformation. (ARKEO-RMNE)
Distribution Requirements: (ALC-AS, HST-AS), (CA-AG, HA-AG, LA-AG)
Exploratory Studies: (CU-ITL)

Last Four Terms Offered: Spring 2025, Spring 2014
Schedule of Classes (https://classes.cornell.edu/)

RELST 3588 - Archaeology and the Bible (3 Credits)
Crosslisted with NES 3588, JWST 3588, ARKEO 3588
The purpose of the course is to place the Bible within the context of a larger ancient world that can be explored by systematic excavation of physical remains. Students will become familiar with archaeological excavations and finds from ancient Syria-Palestine from 10,000 bce to 586 bce. We will explore this archaeological evidence on its own terms, taking into consideration factors such as archaeological method and the interpretive frameworks in which the excavators themselves work, as well as the implications of this body of evidence for understanding the complexity and diversity of biblical Israel. (ARKEO-RMNE)
Distribution Requirements: (ALC-AS, HST-AS), (CA-AG, D-AG, HA-AG, LA-AG)
Exploratory Studies: (CU-ITL)

Last Four Terms Offered: Spring 2025, Spring 2023, Spring 2019, Spring 2012
Schedule of Classes (https://classes.cornell.edu/)

RELST 3695 - History of Christianity (3 Credits)
Crosslisted with NES 3695
This course offers an introduction of Christianity from the apostle Paul through the seventeenth century, with an emphasis on the diversity of Christian traditions, beliefs, and practices. We explore the origins of Christianity within Judaism in the eastern Mediterranean world, the spread of Christianity, the development of ecclesiastical institutions, the rise and establishment of monasticism, and the various controversies that occupied the church throughout its history. The course draws on primary literary sources (from biblical literature to council proceedings, monastic rules, sermons, theological treatises, and biographies) as well as Christian art, inscriptions, music, and manuscripts.
Distribution Requirements: (D-AG, HA-AG), (HST-AS, SCD-AS)
Last Four Terms Offered: Fall 2026
Schedule of Classes (https://classes.cornell.edu/)

RELST 3720 - Women and Gender in Biblical Israel (3 Credits)
Crosslisted with NES 3720, JWST 3720, FGSS 3721
This course focuses on how Biblical texts represent women in ancient Israel, and how the Bible's representations constitute both a fabrication and a manifestation of social life on the ground. We will use biblical, archaeological, and ancient Near Eastern textual evidence to consider the complicated relationship between ancient society and the textual and material records from which we reconstruct it. In addition, this course will examine how women's roles in the Hebrew Bible have been understood and integrated in later Jewish and Christian thought, and how these discourses shape contemporary American attitudes towards women, sexuality, and gender.
Distribution Requirements: (ALC-AS, SCD-AS), (CA-AG, D-AG, LA-AG)
Exploratory Studies: (CU-ITL); (EUAREA)

Last Four Terms Offered: Fall 2024, Spring 2022, Fall 2015, Spring 2013
Schedule of Classes (https://classes.cornell.edu/)

RELST 3724 - Death and the Afterlife in Islam (3 Credits)
Crosslisted with NES 3724, MEDVL 3724
What happens after death? If there is an Afterlife, how is it connected to earthly life? What would the Afterlife actually look like? What role does God or Satan play in the Afterlife? Since the earliest Qur'anic Revelations, Muslims have questioned, imagined and written about the Afterlife. In this course, we will read widely from across the Islamic religious and literary traditions, reading primary texts in translation. We will begin with a survey of the imagination of the Afterlife in scriptural, religious and literary texts, before examining the role and importance of the Afterlife in Islamic legal thinking and morality. Thereafter, we will focus on theological and ethical problems that arise from the imagination of the Afterlife, focusing in particular on the gendered experience of the Afterlife, as well as the question of whether the individual has free will and moral agency or whether eschatological fate is predetermined.
Distribution Requirements: (ETM-AS), (KCM-AG)
Exploratory Studies: (CU-ITL)

Last Four Terms Offered: Spring 2024
Schedule of Classes (https://classes.cornell.edu/)

RELST 3738 - Identity in the Ancient World (3 Credits)
Crosslisted with CLASS 3738, ARKEO 3738
(ARKEO-COS, ARKEO-RMNE)
Last Four Terms Offered: Spring 2022, Spring 2021, Fall 2019, Spring 2018
Schedule of Classes (https://classes.cornell.edu/)

RELST 3739 - Archaeology of Ancient Greek Religion (3 Credits)
Crosslisted with CLASS 3739, ARKEO 3839, ANTHR 3839
What is religion, and how can we use material culture to investigate ancient beliefs and rituals? This course (1) explores major themes and problems in the archaeology of ancient Greek religion, and (2) compares and critiques selected theoretical and methodological approaches to the archaeology of cult more generally. Students will examine ritual artifacts, cult sites, and other aspects of religious material culture, as well as primary textual sources (in translation). (ARKEO-RMNE, ARKEO-TM)
Distribution Requirements: (ALC-AS), (CA-AG, LA-AG)
Last Four Terms Offered: Spring 2025, Fall 2016
Schedule of Classes (https://classes.cornell.edu/)

RELST 3770 - On Practice and Perfection (3 Credits)
Crosslisted with FREN 3770, MEDVL 3760
Practice makes perfect, the old saying goes, but the nature of that connection remains opaque. This course, conducted in English and intended as a sequel to FREN 3540 - On Paying Attention, gives students the opportunity to engage with everyday material and spiritual practices, and to reflect upon the kids of things these practices make. What is the place of routine and repetition in our lives? How can we open a conversation about our habits? We'll look for models to the long history of writing on the subject, largely but not exclusively by Christian thinkers (e.g. Augustine, Benedict, Aelred, Francis, Ignatius), even as we develop new ways of accounting for, and developing, the practices that make our lives meaningful. Artists, athletes, and introverts especially welcome.
Distribution Requirements: (CA-AG, KCM-AG), (ETM-AS, GLC-AS)
Last Four Terms Offered: Fall 2025, Fall 2022, Fall 2019, Spring 2017
Schedule of Classes (https://classes.cornell.edu/)

RELST 3778 - Pharaohs and Fables (3 Credits)
Crosslisted with NES 3778, ARKEO 3778
The figure of the ancient Egyptian pharaoh looms large in the modern imagination, whether as awesome demigod or awful despot. But how did these fabled kings portray themselves, and how were they seen by their subjects? To probe the ideology of Egyptian kingship and examine how it was celebrated and questioned, we will read a selection of ancient Egyptian texts in translation: royal dream visions and birth legends; records of tomb robberies and an assassination conspiracy; and tales of cantankerous monarchs and squabbling gods. Skepticism, humor, and historical memory abound in these writings, which will introduce nonspecialists to one of the world?s earliest literary traditions. (ARKEO-RMNE)
Distribution Requirements: (ALC-AS), (CA-AG, LA-AG)
Exploratory Studies: (CU-ITL)

Last Four Terms Offered: Spring 2026
Schedule of Classes (https://classes.cornell.edu/)

RELST 3787 - The Qur'an (3 Credits)
Crosslisted with NES 3787, MEDVL 3787
The Qur'an is a cornucopia of stories, laws, apocalyptic visions, Paradisical landscapes and stark warnings. This course presents students with the opportunity not only to read the Qur'an in translation in its entirety, but also to explore different ways in which the Qur'anic text has been and can be interpreted, and the different religious, social and ethical questions that derive from different methods of interpretation. Across the course, students will be asked to explore questions, such as: how does dating the Qur'an impact interpretation? How does the debate concerning Qur'anic (un)createdness impact its interpretation? Is it possible to use extra-Qur'anic material to interpret the Qur'an? How can the Qur'an be read as a literary text? Or as a source of law? Or as a source for history? What is the Qur'an's own view of the past, present and future? How do feminist and queer Muslims read and interpret the Qur'an? This course is secular and academic in nature. We will study a wide range of religious and secular/academic approaches to interpreting the Qur'an, some of which may challenge widely-held assumptions about the Qur'an's authorship, dating, composition and interpretation.
Distribution Requirements: (ALC-AS), (CA-AG, LA-AG)
Exploratory Studies: (CU-ITL)

Last Four Terms Offered: Fall 2025, Fall 2024
Schedule of Classes (https://classes.cornell.edu/)

RELST 3888 - Jews, Christians, and Others in Late Antiquity (3 Credits)
Crosslisted with NES 3888, JWST 3888, MEDVL 3888
This course explores the interactions between Jews, Christians, and other religious groups in late antiquity, especially in Sasanian Persia circa the first through seventh century C.E. Students pay particular attention to the portrayals of Christians in Jewish rabbinic literature, including Midrash and Talmud, but also draw from early Christian, Zoroastrian, Manichaean, and other sources. There will be an emphasis on the reading of primary texts in translation in their appropriate historical contexts, and in comparison with one another. Students engage such questions as: How did Jews define themselves in relation to Christians, and vice versa? In what ways did Jews and Christians part ways with one another, as scholars often maintain, and what were the factors at play in their separation? And, lastly, what role did other religious and political groups, such as Gnostics, Zoroastrians, Romans, Mandaeans, Manichaeans, and early Muslims play in these developments?
Distribution Requirements: (ALC-AS, HST-AS), (CA-AG, HA-AG, LA-AG)
Exploratory Studies: (CU-ITL)

Last Four Terms Offered: Fall 2026, Spring 2023, Spring 2022, Fall 2020
Schedule of Classes (https://classes.cornell.edu/)

RELST 4020 - Buddhist Moderns: Visions of Human Flourishing (3 Credits)
Crosslisted with ASIAN 4020
Do modern times (which are experienced and conceptualized in varied ways) pose distinctive problems and opportunities for Buddhists? How are Buddhist teachings drawn into forms of social and political critique, activist and advocacy projects, and theorizing about human communities and social processes? In the 20th and 21st centuries, how do Buddhist teachings and practices inform practical and conceptual approaches to human flourishing? Drawing on thinkers from several parts of Asia and the Americas, this seminar highlights how persons work creatively with Buddhist teachings. We shall explore how Buddhist teachings are interpreted to address painful circumstances, as well as how such hermeneutics may offer new (and sometimes liberatory) ways of seeing selves, others, and communities. Writers and artists considered in this seminar interpret Buddhist teachings and practices in relation to capitalism, race, gender, sexuality, environmental ethics, and nationalism. (ASIAN-RL)
Distribution Requirements: (ALC-AS), (CA-AG, LA-AG)
Exploratory Studies: (SAAREA, SEAREA)

Last Four Terms Offered: Spring 2026, Spring 2025
Schedule of Classes (https://classes.cornell.edu/)

RELST 4021 - Zen Buddhism and its Japanese Context: Major Thinkers (3 Credits)
Crosslisted with ASIAN 4021
This course explores the Buddhist tradition of Zen through a focus on the major figures in its Japanese context who have contributed to its foundational practices and promulgation and its revitalization after periods of decline. We begin with the introduction of Buddhism into Japan in the 6th century and the issues surrounding the establishment of the ?six schools? of Buddhism in the 8th century and the prestige and dominance of the Tendai School on Mt. Hiei. This allows us to see the uniquely Japanese context of religious debates. We then turn to an exploration of the Zen thinkers Eisai, D?, Keizan, and Hakuin and see how these thinkers all introduced ideas to Japanese Zen practice that led the tradition into new directions from its Chinese origins: tea cultivation, work practice, and monastic reform. Last, we study how Zen came to be regarded as the ?way of the warrior? and a symbol of Japanese uniqueness and militarism. The course ends with an exploration of Zen expansion in the US in the 20th century and the ?D? boom? in American literary theory. (ASIAN-RL)
Prerequisites: ASIAN 2250 or equivalent.
Distribution Requirements: (ALC-AS, HST-AS), (CA-AG, HA-AG, LA-AG)
Exploratory Studies: (EAAREA)

Last Four Terms Offered: Fall 2026, Fall 2025, Spring 2024, Spring 2023
Schedule of Classes (https://classes.cornell.edu/)

RELST 4023 - Buddhism and Politics in South and Southeast Asia (3 Credits)
Crosslisted with ASIAN 4023
Buddhist ideas, practices, and institutions play many roles in the political life of South and Southeast Asia, in the present day and throughout the long history of these regions. This course approaches ?politics? broadly. Thus, the course explores how persons invoke Buddhist concepts and understandings of Buddhist traditions when acting for and against state and sovereign powers, but also how Buddhist ideas and institutions are drawn into other social projects that shape the flow and accumulation of social capital, economic benefit, and authority. Case studies and theoretical works address historical, modern, and contemporary materials. Assignments include the opportunity for students to focus on a contemporary regional location of their choice. (ASIAN-RL)
Distribution Requirements: (CA-AG), (GLC-AS)
Exploratory Studies: (SAAREA, SEAREA)

Last Four Terms Offered: Fall 2026
Schedule of Classes (https://classes.cornell.edu/)

RELST 4100 - Latin Philosophical Texts (1-2 Credits)
Crosslisted with PHIL 4002, MEDVL 4002
Reading and translation of Latin philosophical texts.
Exploratory Studies: (EUAREA)

Last Four Terms Offered: Fall 2026, Fall 2025, Fall 2024, Spring 2023
Schedule of Classes (https://classes.cornell.edu/)

RELST 4102 - Topics in Biblical Hebrew Prose (3 Credits)
Crosslisted with HEBRW 4102, JWST 4102
Seminar covering a topic in Biblical Hebrew prose.
Prerequisites: HEBRW 1101 and HEBRW 1102; or HEBRW 1110.
Distribution Requirements: (ALC-AS, FLOPI-AS), (CA-AG, LA-AG)
Exploratory Studies: (CU-ITL)

Last Four Terms Offered: Spring 2022, Spring 2019, Spring 2016, Spring 2012
Schedule of Classes (https://classes.cornell.edu/)

RELST 4110 - Religion and Social Life (3 Credits)
Crosslisted with SOC 4110
Global conflicts, raising children, electing presidents, praying for a loved one: from the mundane to the extraordinary, religion plays a significant role in social life, regardless of whether or not one considers oneself religious. In this course we will investigate religion and its impacts in society from a sociological perspective. Questions we will ask include: How does religion fit into society? What are the contours of contemporary religion in the United States and around the world? How do religious identities interact with other aspects of social life, including gender, race and politics? In what ways have religions and religious life changed over time? As social scientists, how can we best study religion? The course will use examples from a variety of religious and secular traditions to help us understand religion's sociological significance in the contemporary world.
Distribution Requirements: (D-AG), (SCD-AS)
Last Four Terms Offered: Spring 2025, Fall 2023, Spring 2019
Schedule of Classes (https://classes.cornell.edu/)

RELST 4196 - From the Bible to the Museum: Jewish Memory and Public History (4 Credits)
Crosslisted with HIST 4196, JWST 4196, NES 4196
How has the remembrance of the past shaped the evolution of Jewish religion, identity, and culture from Biblical times to the present? How have the creation, dissemination, and preservation of Jewish memory changed over time? How is Jewish history used in political discourse in contemporary society in the U.S. and around the Globe? How can the historical tools be utilized to generate a sophisticated and discerning public engagement with the complexities of the Jewish past? In this course, students will explore these questions through seminar discussions, attending, evaluating, and critiquing exhibits and cultural events and watching films that put Jewish history on display, and by deploying their own research, writing, and creative skills to produce public facing final projects or a traditional research paper. (HIST-HTR)
Distribution Requirements: (ALC-AS, HST-AS), (CA-AG, HA-AG, LA-AG)
Last Four Terms Offered: Fall 2024
Schedule of Classes (https://classes.cornell.edu/)

RELST 4215 - Topics in Medieval Philosophy (3 Credits)
Crosslisted with PHIL 4215
Advanced discussion of a topic in medieval philosophy.
Distribution Requirements: (ALC-AS, HST-AS), (CA-AG, HA-AG, LA-AG)
Last Four Terms Offered: Spring 2026, Spring 2020, Fall 2019
Schedule of Classes (https://classes.cornell.edu/)

RELST 4240 - The Sexual Politics of Religion (3 Credits)
Crosslisted with FGSS 4290, ANTHR 4490, LGBT 4290
Drawing on feminist and queer theory and ethnographic studies of ritual and devotional practices around the world this course will consider the relationships among the social organization of sexuality, embodiment of gender, nationalisms and everyday forms of worship. In addition to investigating the norms of family, gender, sex and the nation embedded in dominant institutionalized forms of religion we will study such phenomena as ritual transgenderism, neo tantrism, theogamy (marriage to a deity), priestly celibacy and temple prostitution. The disciplinary and normalizing effects of religion as well as the possibilities of religiosity as a mode of social dissent will be explored through different ethnographic and fictional accounts of ritual and faithful practices in Africa, Asia and the Americas.
Enrollment Information: Enrollment limited to: seniors, juniors, and sophomores.
Distribution Requirements: (CA-AG, KCM-AG), (ETM-AS, GLC-AS)
Last Four Terms Offered: Spring 2025, Fall 2015, Fall 2012
Schedule of Classes (https://classes.cornell.edu/)

RELST 4256 - Time and History in Ancient Mexico (3 Credits)
Crosslisted with ANTHR 4256, ARKEO 4256, LATA 4250
An introduction to belief systems in ancient Mexico and Central America, emphasizing the blending of religion, astrology, myth, history, and prophecy. Interpreting text and image in pre-Columbian books and inscriptions is a major focus. (ARKEO-RLAC)
Distribution Requirements: (ALC-AS), (CA-AG, LA-AG)
Exploratory Studies: (LAAREA)

Last Four Terms Offered: Fall 2026, Fall 2024, Fall 2021, Fall 2019
Schedule of Classes (https://classes.cornell.edu/)

RELST 4310 - Methods in Medieval (3 Credits)
Crosslisted with ARTH 4310, NES 4700, JWST 4310, MEDVL 4310, SPAN 4570
Topic: Writing Through the Forest in Search of Trees. Hello, Humanities Student! Are you a plotter or a pantser? Not sure? Come and join us to find out, and to gain valuable insight into what kind of a writer you are, and how to manage that writer most effectively and productively. This theme-centered methods seminar, through a communal focus on trees, woods, glens, and copses in the pre-modern world, will hone in on the most indispensable tool in the humanist's belt: writing. From the generation of ideas, to their organization into an outline (or a blueprint, or whatever euphemism we, as a group or as individuals, decide to apply to the initial, tangled pile of yarn) to the first draft. Followed by frank and constructive criticism of the initial draft as a group and in pairs, and then on to the part that all students-really, all humanists?okay, all writers-find to be the greatest struggle: Your paper has some good ideas, but it really needs a rewrite. Now what do you do? As we write, and rewrite, we will also read widely. In addition to primary sources, scholarly articles and essays, we will include criticism, personal essay, theory, excerpts from fiction, and more, in an effort to open students' writing up to a myriad of possibilities for persuasive and compelling written communication.
Distribution Requirements: (ALC-AS, HST-AS), (CA-AG, HA-AG, LA-AG)
Last Four Terms Offered: Fall 2026, Fall 2025, Fall 2023, Spring 2021
Schedule of Classes (https://classes.cornell.edu/)

RELST 4351 - Problems in Byzantine Art (4 Credits)
Crosslisted with ARTH 4351, CLASS 4752, MEDVL 4351, NES 4351, VISST 4351, ARKEO 4351
Topic Spring 23: Portraiture.Byzantine artists produced a wide variety of images that modern interpreters have recognized as portraits. These images illuminate individual identity and visual representation in Byzantium. On the one hand, the constituent elements of a portrait (such as physiognomy, gesture, dress, and attributes) illuminate cultural understandings of personhood. On the other hand, those elements are assembled and displayed through means (composition, medium, and context) that illuminate cultural understandings of images and their ability to extend personal energy. We will focus on the primary sources, including preserved monuments (manuscripts, mosaics, sculptures, etc.) and literary witnesses (epigrams, historians' accounts, etc.), supplemented by selections from the secondary literature on identity, individuality, and subject formation in Byzantium.Seminar topics rotate each semester. Previous topics include: Ravenna, Hagia Sophia, Byzantine Iconoclasm, Spiral Relief Columns. (ARKEO-RMNE)
Distribution Requirements: (ALC-AS, HST-AS), (CA-AG, HA-AG, LA-AG)
Last Four Terms Offered: Spring 2023, Spring 2022, Spring 2016, Spring 2014
Schedule of Classes (https://classes.cornell.edu/)

RELST 4414 - Topics in South Asian Culture and Literature (2 Credits)
Crosslisted with ASIAN 4414, ANTHR 4514
Topics will address South Asian culture and literature and change in relation to curricular needs within the Department of Asian Studies. (ASIAN-SC)
Exploratory Studies: (SAAREA)

Last Four Terms Offered: Spring 2025, Spring 2023
Schedule of Classes (https://classes.cornell.edu/)

RELST 4451 - Gender and Sexuality in Southeast Asian Cinema (3 Credits)
Crosslisted with ASIAN 4451, FGSS 4451, PMA 4451, LGBT 4451, COML 4451, SHUM 4451
Examines the new cinemas of Southeast Asia and their engagement with contemporary discourses of gender and sexuality. It pays special attention to the ways in which sexuality and gendered embodiment are at present linked to citizenship and other forms of belonging and to how the films draw on Buddhist and Islamic traditions of representation and belief. Focusing on globally circulating Southeast Asian films of the past 15 years, the course draws on current writing in feminism, Buddhist studies, affect theory, queer studies, postcolonial theory, and film studies to ask what new understandings of subjectivity might emerge from these cinemas and their political contexts. Films are drawn from both mainstream and independent cinema and will include the work of directors such as Apichatpong Weerasethakul, Danny and Oxide Pang, Yau Ching, Thunska Pansittivorakul, Garin Nugroho, and Jean-Jacques Annaud. (ASIAN-SC)
Distribution Requirements: (ALC-AS, SCD-AS), (CA-AG, D-AG, LA-AG)
Exploratory Studies: (SEAREA)

Last Four Terms Offered: Fall 2023, Fall 2022, Fall 2021, Fall 2019
Schedule of Classes (https://classes.cornell.edu/)

RELST 4480 - Projects of Modernity in Asia (4 Credits)
Crosslisted with ASIAN 4480, HIST 4408
What does it mean to be ?modern?? How is it tied to one?s (person, community, country, government, stakeholders) desires and aspirations for the future? How does it relate to one?s past? In this seminar we explore how idea(l)s of modernity have taken shape, how they were received and articulated, and how they continue to change. We will read scholarship addressing idea(l)s of modernity in relation to health, technology, the environment, politics, gender, the economy, and more. Reading materials will adapt to seminar members? interests. (ASIAN-SC, HIST-HAN)
Prerequisites: one 3000 level course in the humanities; one 2000 level course in Asian Studies.
Distribution Requirements: (CA-AG), (GLC-AS)
Exploratory Studies: (SEAREA)

Last Four Terms Offered: Fall 2025, Spring 2023, Spring 2021
Schedule of Classes (https://classes.cornell.edu/)

RELST 4488 - Islamic Mysticism and the West (3 Credits)
Crosslisted with NES 4488, COML 4488
Sufism, the mystical tradition in Islam, has exerted considerable influence on modern European and American thought. Much like the adoption of yoga and other Eastern spiritual practices in the modern West, Sufism has been shorn of much of its medieval and Islamic origins in its transmutation into broader Western neo-spiritual and theosophic frameworks for understanding the human's relationship to God, the world, the self and the body. In this course, we will explore Islamic mysticism through its adoption in modern Western literature. What about Sufism attracted Western spiritual seekers? How did they understand Sufi thought and ideas? How did they come to learn about Sufi practices and literature? In this course we will read deeply from the work of three significant Sufi-inspired authors. Beginning with the work of the extremely controversial Sufi psychologist Idries Shah, we will explore how Sufi stories were brought to bear on the field of psychotherapy and in European spiritualist circles. After this, we will explore the influence of Sufism on André Gide's phantasmic celebrations of earthly sensuality, before turning to Doris Lessing's speculative Sufi space fiction.
Distribution Requirements: (ALC-AS), (CA-AG, LA-AG)
Exploratory Studies: (CU-ITL)

Last Four Terms Offered: Fall 2026
Schedule of Classes (https://classes.cornell.edu/)

RELST 4537 - Shi'ism: Poetics and Politics (3 Credits)
Crosslisted with NES 4537, ANTHR 4637, SHUM 4537
This course offers a broad survey of contemporary Shi'i beliefs, practices, and politics with a focus on Twelver or Imami Shi'ism. Through a close examination of ethnographies, intellectual and political histories, theological writings, and more we will investigate the themes which define the politics and cultural practices of contemporary Shi'ism.
In particular, we will highlight the ways in which Shi'is utilize their theological beliefs to negotiate and respond to the socio-political context of the times in which they live. The course begins by examining the early days of what would later be called Shi'ism. We then examine the key theological concepts which distinguish Shi'ism from Sunnism, including themes of adalat (divine justice), shahadat (martyrdom), the Karbala paradigm, and the role of the imamate and clerical class. The rest of course is devoted to investigating the ways that Shi'ism informs and interacts with the social realm and vice versa, ranging from negotiations of the everyday to responding to moments of great civil and society unrest and to that which is called sectarianism. Travelling from South Asia to the Middle East, from Africa to America, we will ultimately examine how Shi'i beliefs and identity act as a dynamic force for shaping the worlds in which they live today.
Distribution Requirements: (D-AG, HA-AG), (HST-AS, SCD-AS)
Exploratory Studies: (CU-ITL)

Last Four Terms Offered: Spring 2024, Fall 2020, Fall 2018
Schedule of Classes (https://classes.cornell.edu/)

RELST 4540 - Moses Maimonides (3 Credits)
Crosslisted with NES 4540, JWST 4540, SPAN 4540, MEDVL 4540
Moses Maimonides who was born in Cordoba (1138), moved to Fez as a youth and died in Cairo (1204) is regarded by Jewish, Islamic, and Christian tradition alike as the most important Jewish religious intellectual of the classical age of Islam/the High Middle Ages. This seminar will examine Maimonides as the product of his time and place including his complex relationship with Arabo-Islamic culture and, because of his stature as a communal figure, rabbinic scholar, court physician and philosopher, his role as a catalyst for cultural developments. For comparative purposes we also consider Maimonides' Andalusi contemporary, Ibn Rushd, the philosopher, Muslim jurist, physician and scholar of Islamic law.
Distribution Requirements: (CA-AG, HA-AG), (GLC-AS, HST-AS)
Exploratory Studies: (CU-ITL); (LAAREA)

Last Four Terms Offered: Fall 2026, Spring 2023, Spring 2020, Spring 2016
Schedule of Classes (https://classes.cornell.edu/)

RELST 4548 - The Bible in America (3 Credits)
Crosslisted with NES 4548, JWST 4548, AMST 4548
This course will focus on the array of perspectives offered in the Hebrew Bible and New Testament on such contemporary social issues as: immigration; abortion rights, surrogate childbirth, gay marriage, gender identity, etc. We will consider the range of voices the Bible preserves on these and other topics, and how biblical texts and biblically based arguments shape and inform American political discourse. Students will be expected to read biblical texts on their own terms in their ancient Israelite and early Christian contexts, as well as to consider how those texts have been received with Jewish and Christian interpretive traditions and absorbed into American political thought. Students will read political theory, Jewish and Christian ethics, recent newspaper and magazine articles and will also consider other forms of media.
Distribution Requirements: (D-AG, HA-AG), (HST-AS, SCD-AS)
Last Four Terms Offered: Fall 2025, Spring 2017
Schedule of Classes (https://classes.cornell.edu/)

RELST 4557 - Desert Monasticism (3 Credits)
Crosslisted with NES 4557, CLASS 4677, MEDVL 4557
How and why do landscapes come to inspire the religious imagination? And why do religious practices, rituals, traditions, and beliefs take place in particular landscapes? This seminar treats these questions by focusing on the desert, both imagined and real, as it has shaped religious ascetic practice, especially the development of Christian monasticism in the Middle East. We will read widely from monastic literatures, mostly from late ancient Egypt, to explore both the historical development of monasticism in Christianity and examine why the monastic impulse seems so closely tied to the desert. In addition to reading saints lives and the stories of hermits, we will read early monastic rules, the desert fathers, and we will draw from archaeological sources to examine the varieties of ascetic practices in the deserts of late ancient Egypt, Gaza, Sinai, Palestine, and Syria. Throughout the course we will explore ancient and modern ideas about wilderness and we will explore parallels between ancient Near Eastern literatures and their nineteenth- and twentieth-century parallels in the American frontier and environmental literatures.
Distribution Requirements: (ETM-AS, HST-AS), (HA-AG, KCM-AG)
Exploratory Studies: (CU-ITL)

Last Four Terms Offered: Spring 2023, Fall 2019, Fall 2017, Fall 2014
Schedule of Classes (https://classes.cornell.edu/)

RELST 4659 - The Idea of Biblical Israel (3 Credits)
Crosslisted with NES 4659, JWST 4659, ANTHR 4659, ARKEO 4659, SHUM 4659
This course examines the fixity of Bible's representations of Israel as it relates to the fluidity of Israel's social, political, and religious experience as revealed in archaeology and texts from outside the Bible. We will use the tools of biblical criticism (philological, archaeological, literary historical) and methods drawn from such disciplines as History, Political Science, Anthropology, and Literary Criticism, to examine four biblical narrative traditions: The Joseph story; the exodus from Egypt; the Israelite conquest of Canaan; and the Song of Deborah, a text widely regarded as the oldest in the Hebrew Bible. Each of these played an essential role in the process of fabricating biblical Israel. As works of biblical historiography, each functioned to create a shared sense of a Jewish past in light of the urgencies of the present. Each is also witness to a creative process that unfolded when the past was still malleable, the terms not yet rigid. We will focus on the modes and materials of textual production and on how modern historians engage biblical narrative in fabricating their own narrative histories of ancient Israel. We will also consider how ancient and modern historical writing on ancient Israel has been put into the service of contemporary political discourse on boundaries and borders in Israel-Palestine. (ARKEO-RMNE)
Distribution Requirements: (ALC-AS), (CA-AG, LA-AG)
Last Four Terms Offered: Fall 2023, Spring 2021
Schedule of Classes (https://classes.cornell.edu/)

RELST 4665 - Augustine (3 Credits)
Crosslisted with CLASS 4665, PHIL 4210
Topics for this course vary.
Distribution Requirements: (ETM-AS), (KCM-AG)
Exploratory Studies: (EUAREA)

Last Four Terms Offered: Spring 2023, Fall 2021, Spring 2018, Fall 2014
Schedule of Classes (https://classes.cornell.edu/)

RELST 4691 - Crossing the Apocalypse (3 Credits)
Crosslisted with SHUM 4691, JWST 4695, MEDVL 4691, NES 4695, CLASS 4691
Last Four Terms Offered: Spring 2024
Schedule of Classes (https://classes.cornell.edu/)

RELST 4706 - The Poetics of Embodiment: Figurines in the Early Middle Ages (3 Credits)
Crosslisted with SHUM 4706, MEDVL 4706, ARKEO 4706, ARTH 4706
How can a small sculpture produce monumental effects? Recent shifts in metal-detecting and excavation practices have transformed our understanding of the scope of figural art after the Roman empire's collapse; the field is newly flooded with evidence of toys, puppets, and other tiny bodies. Working across the disciplines of anthropology, archaeology, art history, philosophy, and gender studies, this course investigates how figurines shaped space, ritual, and concepts of personhood in the early medieval world. (ARKEO-RMNE)
Distribution Requirements: (ALC-AS), (CA-AG, LA-AG)
Last Four Terms Offered: Fall 2025
Schedule of Classes (https://classes.cornell.edu/)

RELST 4714 - Global Indigenous Religious Histories (3 Credits)
Crosslisted with SHUM 4714, ANTHR 4714
This course uses an interdisciplinary approach to the study of religion to introduce students to Indigenous histories from a sample of locations around the world. The class is organized geographically and thematically and encourages students to engage with questions about the category of religion, the idea of "Indigenous" as a global term, and the role of colonization in shaping history.
Distribution Requirements: (ALC-AS), (CA-AG, LA-AG)
Last Four Terms Offered: Spring 2026
Schedule of Classes (https://classes.cornell.edu/)

RELST 4931 - Vitality and Power in China (4 Credits)
Crosslisted with HIST 4931, CAPS 4931, ASIAN 4429, STS 4911, BSOC 4911
Chinese discourses have long linked the circulation of cosmic energies, political power, and bodily vitalities. In these models political order, spiritual cultivation, and health are achieved and enhanced through harmonizing these flows across the levels of Heaven-and-Earth, state, and humankind. It is when these movements are blocked or out of synchrony that we find disordered climates, societies, and illness. In this course, we will examine the historical emergence and development of these models of politically resonant persons and bodily centered polities, reading across primary texts in translation from these otherwise often separated fields. For alternate frameworks of analysis as well as for comparative perspectives, we will also examine theories of power and embodiment from other cultures, including recent scholarship in anthropology and critical theory. (ASIAN-SC, HIST-HAN, HIST-HPE)
Distribution Requirements: (D-AG, HA-AG), (HST-AS, SCD-AS)
Exploratory Studies: (EAAREA)

Last Four Terms Offered: Fall 2025, Fall 2020, Spring 2019, Spring 2013
Schedule of Classes (https://classes.cornell.edu/)

RELST 4990 - Directed Study (2-4 Credits)
For undergraduates who wish to obtain research experience or do extensive reading on a special topic. Students select a topic in consultation with the faculty member who has agreed to supervise the course.
Enrollment Information: Enrollment limited to: Religious Studies majors.
Exploratory Studies: (CU-UG)

Last Four Terms Offered: Fall 2026, Fall 2025, Fall 2024, Fall 2023
Schedule of Classes (https://classes.cornell.edu/)

RELST 4991 - Directed Study (2-4 Credits)
For undergraduates who wish to obtain research experience or do extensive reading on a special topic. Students select a topic in consultation with the faculty member who has agreed to supervise the course.
Enrollment Information: Enrollment limited to: Religious Studies majors.
Exploratory Studies: (CU-UG)

Last Four Terms Offered: Spring 2026, Spring 2025, Spring 2024, Spring 2023
Schedule of Classes (https://classes.cornell.edu/)

RELST 4995 - Senior Honors Essay I (4 Credits)
RELST 4995 is the first course in the Honors two-part sequence. The Honors Program is open to Religious Studies majors who have done superior work and who wish to devote a substantial part of their senior year to advanced, specialized, independent research and writing of a thesis. Successfully completing an honors thesis will require sustained interest, exceptional ability, diligence, and enthusiasm. While admissions to the Honors Program and completion of a thesis do not guarantee that students will be awarded honors in Religious Studies, most students find the experience as intellectually rewarding as it is rigorous.
Exploratory Studies: (CU-UG)

Last Four Terms Offered: Fall 2026, Spring 2026, Fall 2025, Spring 2025
Schedule of Classes (https://classes.cornell.edu/)

RELST 4996 - Senior Honors Essay II (4 Credits)
RELST 4996 is the second course in the Honors two-part sequence. The Honors Program is open to Religious Studies majors who have done superior work and who wish to devote a substantial part of their senior year to advanced, specialized, independent research and writing of a thesis. Successfully completing an honors thesis will require sustained interest, exceptional ability, diligence, and enthusiasm. While admissions to the Honors Program and completion of a thesis do not guarantee that students will be awarded honors in Religious Studies, most students find the experience as intellectually rewarding as it is rigorous.
Exploratory Studies: (CU-UG); (EUAREA)

Last Four Terms Offered: Fall 2026, Spring 2026, Spring 2025, Fall 2023
Schedule of Classes (https://classes.cornell.edu/)

RELST 6020 - Latin Philosophical Texts (1-2 Credits)
Crosslisted with PHIL 6020, LATIN 7262, MEDVL 6020
Reading and translation of Latin philosophical texts.
Exploratory Studies: (EUAREA)

Last Four Terms Offered: Fall 2026, Spring 2026, Fall 2025, Spring 2025
Schedule of Classes (https://classes.cornell.edu/)

RELST 6021 - Zen Buddhism and its Japanese Context: Major Thinkers (3 Credits)
Crosslisted with ASIAN 6021
This course explores the Buddhist tradition of Zen through a focus on the major figures in its Japanese context who have contributed to its foundational practices and promulgation and its revitalization after periods of decline. We begin with the introduction of Buddhism into Japan in the 6th century and the issues surrounding the establishment of the ?six schools? of Buddhism in the 8th century and the prestige and dominance of the Tendai School on Mt. Hiei. This allows us to see the uniquely Japanese context of religious debates. We then turn to an exploration of the Zen thinkers Eisai, D?, Keizan, and Hakuin and see how these thinkers all introduced ideas to Japanese Zen practice that led the tradition into new directions from its Chinese origins: tea cultivation, work practice, and monastic reform. Last, we study how Zen came to be regarded as the ?way of the warrior? and a symbol of Japanese uniqueness and militarism. The course ends with an exploration of Zen expansion in the US in the 20th century and the ?D? boom? in American literary theory. (ASIAN-RL)
Prerequisites: background equivalent to: ASIAN 2250.
Last Four Terms Offered: Fall 2025, Spring 2024, Spring 2023, Spring 2022
Schedule of Classes (https://classes.cornell.edu/)

RELST 6022 - Buddhist Moderns: Visions of Human Flourishing (4 Credits)
Crosslisted with ASIAN 6020
Do modern times (which are experienced and conceptualized in varied ways) pose distinctive problems and opportunities for Buddhists? How are Buddhist teachings drawn into forms of social and political critique, activist and advocacy projects, and theorizing about human communities and social processes? In the 20th and 21st centuries, how do Buddhist teachings and practices inform practical and conceptual approaches to human flourishing? Drawing on thinkers from several parts of Asia and the Americas, this seminar highlights how persons work creatively with Buddhist teachings. We shall explore how Buddhist teachings are interpreted to address painful circumstances, as well as how such hermeneutics may offer new (and sometimes liberatory) ways of seeing selves, others, and communities. Writers and artists considered in this seminar interpret Buddhist teachings and practices in relation to capitalism, race, gender, sexuality, environmental ethics, and nationalism. (ASIAN-RL)
Exploratory Studies: (SAAREA, SEAREA)

Last Four Terms Offered: Spring 2026, Spring 2025
Schedule of Classes (https://classes.cornell.edu/)

RELST 6023 - Buddhism and Politics in South and Southeast Asia (4 Credits)
Crosslisted with ASIAN 6023
Buddhist ideas, practices, and institutions play many roles in the political life of South and Southeast Asia, in the present day and throughout the long history of these regions. This course approaches ?politics? broadly. Thus, the course explores how persons invoke Buddhist concepts and understandings of Buddhist traditions when acting for and against state and sovereign powers, but also how Buddhist ideas and institutions are drawn into other social projects that shape the flow and accumulation of social capital, economic benefit, and authority. Case studies and theoretical works address historical, modern, and contemporary materials. Assignments include the opportunity for students to focus on a contemporary regional location of their choice. (ASIAN-RL)
Exploratory Studies: (SAAREA, SEAREA)

Last Four Terms Offered: Fall 2026
Schedule of Classes (https://classes.cornell.edu/)

RELST 6049 - History, Theory, and Methods in the Academic Study of Religion (3 Credits)
Crosslisted with ASIAN 6049
This course will explore the development of and variety in the academic discipline of Religious Studies. We will consider the emergence of secular approaches to the study of religion arising out of the European Enlightenment, and more particularly, the methods in the academic study of religion based upon different theoretical approaches. We will be particularly concerned to reflect upon the category of religious experience in modern discourses from historical, social scientific, hermeneutical, and psychological points of view.
Prerequisites: One course in Religious Studies.
Exploratory Studies: (EAAREA)

Last Four Terms Offered: Fall 2026
Schedule of Classes (https://classes.cornell.edu/)

RELST 6210 - Topics in Medieval Philosophy (3 Credits)
Crosslisted with PHIL 6210, MEDVL 6210
Graduate seminar covering a topic in medieval philosophy.
Exploratory Studies: (EUAREA)

Last Four Terms Offered: Spring 2026, Spring 2025, Spring 2024, Spring 2023
Schedule of Classes (https://classes.cornell.edu/)

RELST 6284 - Culture, Religion, and Politics (4 Credits)
Crosslisted with GOVT 6284
What types of political outcomes can religion and culture help explain? What political and social factors affect religious identity and institutions? This course is designed to provide graduate students with an overview of theoretical approaches to the study of religion and culture in the social sciences. This course has three objectives. First, students will be able to identify traditional ways in which religion and culture have been theorized and operationalized in political science. Second, students will use empirical evidence to evaluate these theories and measurement strategies and assess potential threats to inference. Finally, students will complete their own research project on the relationship between politics and religion. (GOVT-CP, GOVT-IR)
Last Four Terms Offered: Fall 2024, Fall 2021, Fall 2020
Schedule of Classes (https://classes.cornell.edu/)

RELST 6290 - The Sexual Politics of Religion (3 Credits)
Crosslisted with FGSS 6290, ANTHR 7490, LGBT 6290
Drawing on feminist and queer theory and ethnographic studies of ritual and devotional practices around the world this course will consider the relationships among the social organization of sexuality, embodiment of gender, nationalisms and everyday forms of worship. In addition to investigating the norms of family, gender, sex and the nation embedded in dominant institutionalized forms of religion we will study such phenomena as ritual transgenderism, neo tantrism, theogamy (marriage to a deity), priestly celibacy and temple prostitution. The disciplinary and normalizing effects of religion as well as the possibilities of religiosity as a mode of social dissent will be explored through different ethnographic and fictional accounts of ritual and faithful practices in Africa, Asia and the Americas.
Last Four Terms Offered: Spring 2025, Fall 2015, Fall 2012
Schedule of Classes (https://classes.cornell.edu/)

RELST 6310 - Methods in Medieval (3 Credits)
Crosslisted with ARTH 6310, NES 6700, JWST 6310, MEDVL 6310, SPAN 6590
Topic: Writing Through the Forest in Search of Trees. Hello, Humanities Student! Are you a plotter or a pantser? Not sure? Come and join us to find out, and to gain valuable insight into what kind of a writer you are, and how to manage that writer most effectively and productively. This theme-centered methods seminar, through a communal focus on trees, woods, glens, and copses in the pre-modern world, will hone in on the most indispensable tool in the humanist's belt: writing. From the generation of ideas, to their organization into an outline (or a blueprint, or whatever euphemism we, as a group or as individuals, decide to apply to the initial, tangled pile of yarn) to the first draft. Followed by frank and constructive criticism of the initial draft as a group and in pairs, and then on to the part that all students-really, all humanists?okay, all writers-find to be the greatest struggle: Your paper has some good ideas, but it really needs a rewrite. Now what do you do? As we write, and rewrite, we will also read widely. In addition to primary sources, scholarly articles and essays, we will include criticism, personal essay, theory, excerpts from fiction, and more, in an effort to open students' writing up to a myriad of possibilities for persuasive and compelling written communication.
Last Four Terms Offered: Fall 2026, Fall 2025, Spring 2025, Fall 2023
Schedule of Classes (https://classes.cornell.edu/)

RELST 6330 - A Mediterranean Society and Its Culture (3 Credits)
Crosslisted with NES 6330, JWST 6330, MEDVL 6330
This course examines the cultural and historical interaction of Muslims and Jews from the emergence of Islam in the seventh century through the classical age of Islam down to the turn of the thirteenth century. The intersection of the two cultures (scriptural, spiritual, intellectual, literary, communal, and interpersonal) and members of their respective religious communities will be studied through readings of primary texts (in translation). The course will conclude with some brief reflections on historical memory and the modern and contemporary significance of the two religious communities' interactions during the classical age of Islam.
Exploratory Studies: (CU-ITL)

Last Four Terms Offered: Spring 2025, Fall 2021
Schedule of Classes (https://classes.cornell.edu/)

RELST 6351 - Problems in Byzantine Art (4 Credits)
Crosslisted with ARTH 6351, CLASS 7752, MEDVL 6351, NES 6351, VISST 6351, ARKEO 6351
Seminar topics rotate each semester. Topic for Spring 2023: Portraiture.Byzantine artists produced a wide variety of images that modern interpreters have recognized as portraits. These images illuminate individual identity and visual representation in Byzantium. On the one hand, the constituent elements of a portrait (such as physiognomy, gesture, dress, and attributes) illuminate cultural understandings of personhood. On the other hand, those elements are assembled and displayed through means (composition, medium, and context) that illuminate cultural understandings of images and their ability to extend personal energy. We will focus on the primary sources, including preserved monuments (manuscripts, mosaics, sculptures, etc.) and literary witnesses (epigrams, historians' accounts, etc.), supplemented by selections from the secondary literature on identity, individuality, and subject formation in Byzantium.Previous topics include: Ravenna, Hagia Sophia, Byzantine Iconoclasm, Spiral Relief Columns.
Last Four Terms Offered: Spring 2023, Spring 2022, Spring 2016, Spring 2014
Schedule of Classes (https://classes.cornell.edu/)

RELST 6422 - Gospel and The Blues: A Black Women's History II, 1973-2023 (3 Credits)
Crosslisted with ASRC 6422
In her pathbreaking text Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments: Intimate Histories of Social Upheaval Saidiya Hartman writes that young Black women were radical thinkers who tirelessly imagined other ways to live and never failed to consider how the world might be otherwise. This two-semester course endeavors to travel through those worlds using the cultural and musical forms of gospel and the blues as our compass. The second semester is guided by the work of scholars and writers like Maureen Mahon, Marla Frederick, Lynee Denise, and Deesha Philyaw and artists like the Clark Sisters, Aretha Franklin, Toni Braxton, and Beyonce. Together we will interrogate the spectrum of lived experiences making for a kaleidoscopic sonic history of joy, pleasure, sorrow, resistance, and everything in between.
Last Four Terms Offered: Spring 2025
Schedule of Classes (https://classes.cornell.edu/)

RELST 6448 - Islamic Mysticism (3 Credits)
Crosslisted with NES 6448, MEDVL 6448, HIST 6448
Sufism, popularly understood as Islamic mysticism, is a loose name given to a broad and diverse collection of beliefs, practices and groups that range and vary across time and space. Going from a small and largely secretive group of mystical practitioners to a mainstream form of piety in the late medieval period, Sufism has a fascinating history, filled with intrigue, controversy, conflict and interesting characters. In this course, students will delve deep into the history of Sufism and read widely from across the Sufi and anti-Sufi traditions. Concentration will be given to practical questions of how Sufis saw themselves and their relationship to God and the world, how they built mystic community, spurned or embraced family life, interacted with mainstream society, and engaged in controversial erotic practices. Across the course, we will read Sufi histories and biographies, poetry, introductory treatises, as well as anti-Sufi polemics and stories.
Exploratory Studies: (CU-ITL)

Last Four Terms Offered: Spring 2026, Spring 2025
Schedule of Classes (https://classes.cornell.edu/)

RELST 6537 - Shi'ism: Poetics and Politics (3 Credits)
Crosslisted with NES 6537, ANTHR 7637
This course offers a broad survey of contemporary Shi'i beliefs, practices, and politics with a focus on Twelver or Imami Shi'ism. Through a close examination of ethnographies, intellectual and political histories, theological writings, and more we will investigate the themes which define the politics and cultural practices of contemporary Shi'ism.
In particular, we will highlight the ways in which Shi'is utilize their theological beliefs to negotiate and respond to the socio-political context of the times in which they live. The course begins by examining the early days of what would later be called Shi'ism. We then examine the key theological concepts which distinguish Shi'ism from Sunnism, including themes of adalat (divine justice), shahadat (martyrdom), the Karbala paradigm, and the role of the imamate and clerical class. The rest of course is devoted to investigating the ways that Shi'ism informs and interacts with the social realm and vice versa, ranging from negotiations of the everyday to responding to moments of great civil and society unrest and to that which is called sectarianism. Travelling from South Asia to the Middle East, from Africa to America, we will ultimately examine how Shi'i beliefs and identity act as a dynamic force for shaping the worlds in which they live today.
Exploratory Studies: (CU-ITL)

Last Four Terms Offered: Spring 2024, Fall 2020, Fall 2018
Schedule of Classes (https://classes.cornell.edu/)

RELST 6539 - Islamic Spain: Culture and Society (3 Credits)
Crosslisted with NES 6539, JWST 6539, SPAN 6539, MEDVL 6539, COML 6539
This course examines the culture and society of al-Andalus (Islamic Spain) from 711, when Islam arrived in Iberia, until 1492 and the demise of Nasrid Granada. Through extensive discussion and analysis of Arabic, Latin, and Hebrew primary documents and literary texts of various genres (in translation), the course challenges ideological bases of conventional thinking regarding the social, political, and cultural identity of medieval Spain. Among other things, the class investigates the origins of lyric poetry, the relationships among the various confessional and ethnic communities in al-Andalus and the problems involved in Mozarabic Christian and Andalusi Jewish subcultural adaptations of Andalusi Arabo-Islamic culture.
Exploratory Studies: (CU-ITL); (EUAREA)

Schedule of Classes (https://classes.cornell.edu/)

RELST 6557 - Desert Monasticism (3 Credits)
Crosslisted with NES 6557
How and why do landscapes come to inspire the religious imagination? And why do religious practices, rituals, traditions, and beliefs take place in particular landscapes? This seminar treats these questions by focusing on the desert, both imagined and real, as it has shaped religious ascetic practice, especially the development of Christian monasticism in the Middle East. We will read widely from monastic literatures, mostly from late ancient Egypt, to explore both the historical development of monasticism in Christianity and examine why the monastic impulse seems so closely tied to the desert. In addition to reading saints lives and the stories of hermits, we will read early monastic rules, the desert fathers, and we will draw from archaeological sources to examine the varieties of ascetic practices in the deserts of late ancient Egypt, Gaza, Sinai, Palestine, and Syria. Throughout the course we will explore ancient and modern ideas about wilderness and we will explore parallels between ancient Near Eastern literatures and their nineteenth- and twentieth-century parallels in the American frontier and environmental literatures.
Exploratory Studies: (CU-ITL)

Last Four Terms Offered: Spring 2023, Fall 2019, Fall 2017
Schedule of Classes (https://classes.cornell.edu/)

RELST 6588 - Archaeology and the Bible (3 Credits)
Crosslisted with NES 6588
The purpose of the course is to place the Bible within the context of a larger ancient world that can be explored by systematic excavation of physical remains. Students will become familiar with archaeological excavations and finds from ancient Syria-Palestine from 10,000 bce to 586 bce. We will explore this archaeological evidence on its own terms, taking into consideration factors such as archaeological method and the interpretive frameworks in which the excavators themselves work, as well as the implications of this body of evidence for understanding the complexity and diversity of biblical Israel.
Exploratory Studies: (CU-ITL)

Last Four Terms Offered: Spring 2025, Spring 2023, Spring 2019
Schedule of Classes (https://classes.cornell.edu/)

RELST 6631 - Gender and Sexuality in Southeast Asian Cinema (3 Credits)
Crosslisted with ASIAN 6631, FGSS 6331, LGBT 6331, COML 6651
Examines the new cinemas of Southeast Asia and their engagement with contemporary discourses of gender and sexuality. It pays special attention to the ways in which sexuality and gendered embodiment are at present linked to citizenship and other forms of belonging and to how the films draw on Buddhist and Islamic traditions of representation and belief. Focusing on globally circulating Southeast Asian films of the past 15 years, the course draws on current writing in feminism, Buddhist studies, affect theory, queer studies, postcolonial theory, and film studies to ask what new understandings of subjectivity might emerge from these cinemas and their political contexts. Films are drawn from both mainstream and independent cinema and will include the work of directors such as Apichatpong Weerasethakul, Danny and Oxide Pang, Yau Ching, Thunska Pansittivorakul, Garin Nugroho, and Jean-Jacques Annaud. (ASIAN-SC)
Last Four Terms Offered: Fall 2023, Fall 2022, Fall 2021, Fall 2019
Schedule of Classes (https://classes.cornell.edu/)

RELST 6659 - The Idea of Biblical Israel (3 Credits)
Crosslisted with NES 6659, JWST 6659, ANTHR 7659, ARKEO 7659
This course examines the fixity of Bible's representations of Israel as it relates to the fluidity of Israel's social, political, and religious experience as revealed in archaeology and texts from outside the Bible. We will use the tools of biblical criticism (philological, archaeological, literary historical) and methods drawn from such disciplines as History, Political Science, Anthropology, and Literary Criticism, to examine four biblical narrative traditions: The Joseph story; the exodus from Egypt; the Israelite conquest of Canaan; and the Song of Deborah, a text widely regarded as the oldest in the Hebrew Bible. Each of these played an essential role in the process of fabricating biblical Israel. As works of biblical historiography, each functioned to create a shared sense of a Jewish past in light of the urgencies of the present. Each is also witness to a creative process that unfolded when the past was still malleable, the terms not yet rigid. We will focus on the modes and materials of textual production and on how modern historians engage biblical narrative in fabricating their own narrative histories of ancient Israel. We will also consider how ancient and modern historical writing on ancient Israel has been put into the service of contemporary political discourse on boundaries and borders in Israel-Palestine.
Enrollment Information: Enrollment limited to: graduate and professional students.
Last Four Terms Offered: Fall 2023, Spring 2021
Schedule of Classes (https://classes.cornell.edu/)

RELST 6678 - Projects of Modernity in Asia (4 Credits)
Crosslisted with ASIAN 6678, HIST 6408
What does it mean to be ?modern?? How is it tied to one?s (person, community, country, government, stakeholders) desires and aspirations for the future? How does it relate to one?s past? In this seminar we explore how idea(l)s of modernity have taken shape, how they were received and articulated, and how they continue to change. We will read scholarship addressing idea(l)s of modernity in relation to health, technology, the environment, politics, gender, the economy, and more. Reading materials will adapt to seminar members? interests. (ASIAN-SC)
Prerequisites: one 3000 level course in the humanities; one 2000 level course in Asian Studies.
Exploratory Studies: (SEAREA)

Last Four Terms Offered: Fall 2025, Spring 2023, Spring 2021
Schedule of Classes (https://classes.cornell.edu/)

RELST 6688 - Islamic Mysticism and the West (3 Credits)
Crosslisted with NES 6688, COML 6688
Sufism, the mystical tradition in Islam, has exerted considerable influence on modern European and American thought. Much like the adoption of yoga and other Eastern spiritual practices in the modern West, Sufism has been shorn of much of its medieval and Islamic origins in its transmutation into broader Western neo-spiritual and theosophic frameworks for understanding the human’s relationship to God, the world, the self and the body. In this course, we will explore Islamic mysticism through its adoption in modern Western literature. What about Sufism attracted Western spiritual seekers? How did they understand Sufi thought and ideas? How did they come to learn about Sufi practices and literature? In this course we will read deeply from the work of three significant Sufi-inspired authors. Beginning with the work of the extremely controversial Sufi psychologist Idries Shah, we will explore how Sufi stories were brought to bear on the field of psychotherapy and in European spiritualist circles. After this, we will explore the influence of Sufism on André Gide’s phantasmic celebrations of earthly sensuality, before turning to Doris Lessing’s speculative Sufi space fiction.
Exploratory Studies: (CU-ITL)

Last Four Terms Offered: Fall 2026
Schedule of Classes (https://classes.cornell.edu/)

RELST 6691 - Crossing the Apocalypse (3 Credits)
Crosslisted with SHUM 6691, JWST 6695, MEDVL 6691, NES 6695, CLASS 6691
Last Four Terms Offered: Spring 2024
Schedule of Classes (https://classes.cornell.edu/)

RELST 6706 - The Poetics of Embodiment: Figurines in the Early Middle Ages (3 Credits)
Crosslisted with SHUM 6706, MEDVL 6706, ARKEO 6706, ARTH 6706
How can a small sculpture produce monumental effects? Recent shifts in metal-detecting and excavation practices have transformed our understanding of the scope of figural art after the Roman empire's collapse; the field is newly flooded with evidence of toys, puppets, and other tiny bodies. Working across the disciplines of anthropology, archaeology, art history, philosophy, and gender studies, this course investigates how figurines shaped space, ritual, and concepts of personhood in the early medieval world.
Enrollment Information: Enrollment limited to: graduate and professional students.
Last Four Terms Offered: Fall 2025
Schedule of Classes (https://classes.cornell.edu/)

RELST 6714 - Global Indigenous Religious Histories (3 Credits)
Crosslisted with SHUM 6714, ANTHR 6714
This course uses an interdisciplinary approach to the study of religion to introduce students to Indigenous histories from a sample of locations around the world. The class is organized geographically and thematically and encourages students to engage with questions about the category of religion, the idea of "Indigenous" as a global term, and the role of colonization in shaping history.
Enrollment Information: Enrollment limited to: graduate and professional students.
Last Four Terms Offered: Spring 2026
Schedule of Classes (https://classes.cornell.edu/)

RELST 6720 - Women and Gender in Biblical Israel (3 Credits)
Crosslisted with NES 6720, JWST 6720, FGSS 6721
This course focuses on how Biblical texts represent women in ancient Israel, and how the Bible's representations constitute both a fabrication and a manifestation of social life on the ground. We will use biblical, archaeological, and ancient Near Eastern textual evidence to consider the complicated relationship between ancient society and the textual and material records from which we reconstruct it. In addition, this course will examine how women's roles in the Hebrew Bible have been understood and integrated in later Jewish and Christian thought, and how these discourses shape contemporary American attitudes towards women, sexuality, and gender.
Exploratory Studies: (CU-ITL)

Last Four Terms Offered: Fall 2024, Spring 2022, Fall 2015
Schedule of Classes (https://classes.cornell.edu/)

RELST 6724 - Death and the Afterlife in Islam (3 Credits)
Crosslisted with NES 6724, MEDVL 6724
What happens after death? If there is an Afterlife, how is it connected to earthly life? What would the Afterlife actually look like? What role does God or Satan play in the Afterlife? Since the earliest Qur'anic Revelations, Muslims have questioned, imagined and written about the Afterlife. In this course, we will read widely from across the Islamic religious and literary traditions, reading primary texts in translation. We will begin with a survey of the imagination of the Afterlife in scriptural, religious and literary texts, before examining the role and importance of the Afterlife in Islamic legal thinking and morality. Thereafter, we will focus on theological and ethical problems that arise from the imagination of the Afterlife, focusing in particular on the gendered experience of the Afterlife, as well as the question of whether the individual has free will and moral agency or whether eschatological fate is predetermined.
Exploratory Studies: (CU-ITL)

Last Four Terms Offered: Spring 2024
Schedule of Classes (https://classes.cornell.edu/)

RELST 6787 - The Qur'an (3 Credits)
Crosslisted with NES 6787, MEDVL 6787
The Qur'an is a cornucopia of stories, laws, apocalyptic visions, Paradisical landscapes and stark warnings. This course presents students with the opportunity not only to read the Qur'an in translation in its entirety, but also to explore different ways in which the Qur'anic text has been and can be interpreted, and the different religious, social and ethical questions that derive from different methods of interpretation. Across the course, students will be asked to explore questions, such as: how does dating the Qur'an impact interpretation? How does the debate concerning Qur'anic (un)createdness impact its interpretation? Is it possible to use extra-Qur'anic material to interpret the Qur'an? How can the Qur'an be read as a literary text? Or as a source of law? Or as a source for history? What is the Qur'an's own view of the past, present and future? How do feminist and queer Muslims read and interpret the Qur'an? This course is secular and academic in nature. We will study a wide range of religious and secular/academic approaches to interpreting the Qur'an, some of which may challenge widely-held assumptions about the Qur'an's authorship, dating, composition and interpretation.
Exploratory Studies: (CU-ITL)

Last Four Terms Offered: Fall 2025, Fall 2024
Schedule of Classes (https://classes.cornell.edu/)

RELST 6836 - Gandhi's Politics (4 Credits)
Crosslisted with GOVT 6836
Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi is arguably the most consequential anti-imperialist, the most sophisticated advocate of non-violence, and one the shrewdest political tacticians in modern history. He was also an extraordinarily penetrating, complex, and elusive political thinker. In this seminar we will explore the conceptual foundations and theoretical development of Gandhi's politics in the context of Indian discourses of freedom, mass politics, and decolonization. Through an intensive study of Gandhi's writings, of the influences that shaped it, and of the interlocutors and critics in dialogue with whom he developed his ideas, we will explore the philosophical contours and global impacts of Gandhi's political thought. (GOVT-PT)
Exploratory Studies: (SAAREA)

Last Four Terms Offered: Spring 2026, Spring 2024
Schedule of Classes (https://classes.cornell.edu/)

RELST 6838 - Identity in the Ancient World (4 Credits)
Crosslisted with ARKEO 6838
Last Four Terms Offered: Spring 2022
Schedule of Classes (https://classes.cornell.edu/)

RELST 6865 - Martin Luther King, Jr. (4 Credits)
Crosslisted with GOVT 6865, AMST 6865, ASRC 6865
This seminar is an intensive study of the political thought of Martin Luther King, Jr. Approaching texts in contexts, we will seek to recover King the political thinker from his mythologization in American political culture by carefully reading his books, speeches, sermons, interviews, notes, and correspondence as illocutionary interventions into the major crises and ideological disputes of twentieth century American politics. Topics we will explore include the politics of dignity, leadership and mass politics, rhetoric and democratic persuasion, law and direct action, nonviolence, loss and mourning, race and political economy, global justice, and the practices of prophetic critique. Along the way, we will study King in dialogue with both his contemporaries as well as more recent interventions in the study of civil disobedience, racial capitalism, and Afro-modern political thought. (GOVT-PT)
Last Four Terms Offered: Spring 2025, Spring 2023
Schedule of Classes (https://classes.cornell.edu/)

RELST 6888 - Jews, Christians, and Others in Late Antiquity (3 Credits)
Crosslisted with NES 6888, JWST 6888, MEDVL 6888
This course explores the interactions between Jews, Christians, and other religious groups in late antiquity, especially in Sasanian Persia circa the first through seventh century C.E. Students pay particular attention to the portrayals of Christians in Jewish rabbinic literature, including Midrash and Talmud, but also draw from early Christian, Zoroastrian, Manichaean, and other sources. There will be an emphasis on the reading of primary texts in translation in their appropriate historical contexts, and in comparison with one another. Students engage such questions as: How did Jews define themselves in relation to Christians, and vice versa? In what ways did Jews and Christians part ways with one another, as scholars often maintain, and what were the factors at play in their separation? And, lastly, what role did other religious and political groups, such as Gnostics, Zoroastrians, Romans, Mandaeans, Manichaeans, and early Muslims play in these developments?
Exploratory Studies: (CU-ITL)

Last Four Terms Offered: Fall 2026, Spring 2023, Spring 2022, Fall 2020
Schedule of Classes (https://classes.cornell.edu/)

RELST 7250 - Time and History in Ancient Mexico (3 Credits)
Crosslisted with ANTHR 7250, ARKEO 7250, LATA 7250
Explores the ways Mesoamericans understood the world and their place in it, and the ways they constructed history as these are reflected in the few books that have survived from the period before the European invasion. Examines the structure of writing and systems of notation, especially calendars, and considers their potential for illuminating Mesoamerican world views and approaches to history. Primary focus is detailed analysis of five precolumbian books: Codex Borgia, a central Mexican manual of divinatory ritual; Codex Boturini, a history of migration in central Mexico; Codex Nuttall, a Mixtec dynastic history; and two Maya books of astrology and divination, Codex Dresden and Codex Madrid.
Exploratory Studies: (LAAREA)

Last Four Terms Offered: Fall 2026, Fall 2024, Fall 2021, Fall 2019
Schedule of Classes (https://classes.cornell.edu/)

RELST 7758 - Archaeology of Greek Religion: Theory, Methods, and Practice (3 Credits)
Crosslisted with CLASS 7758, ANTHR 7758, ARKEO 7758, NES 7758
What is religion, and how can we use material culture to investigate ancient beliefs and rituals? This course (1) explores major themes and problems in the archaeology of ancient Greek religion, and (2) compares and critiques selected theoretical and methodological approaches to the archaeology of cult more generally. Students will consider and analyze ritual artifacts, cult sites, and other aspects of religious material culture, as well as primary textual sources (in translation).
Enrollment Information: Enrollment limited to: graduate and professional students.
Last Four Terms Offered: Fall 2023, Spring 2020, Fall 2013, Spring 2012
Schedule of Classes (https://classes.cornell.edu/)