

FALL 2025



REL 170-20

Introduction to the Study of Religion

This course will guide students through a series of case studies that highlight the practical, ethical, and material dimensions of religions around the world. These case studies dramatize how religions are lived with and against the grain of established doctrine, so that students will gain a richer understanding of the ways religious customs have shaped the world around them. The course also serves to introduce students to the basic methods scholars employ to study religion, including history, ethnography, textual analysis, ritual theory, phenomenology, and comparison—tools through which students will formulate their own accounts of religious phenomena.

Prof. James Bielo
MW 12:30-1:50pm



REL 210-20

Introduction to Buddhism

This course offers an introduction to Buddhist history, culture, philosophy, and practice. We explore the major doctrinal varieties of Buddhism, from its inception through the rise of the Mahayana and Tantric or Vajrayana traditions. At the same time, we also investigate Buddhist visual, material, and ritual cultures—which offer windows onto aspects of Buddhism as a lived religion not always visible in scriptural sources. In the process we engage themes like the meaning of suffering, the cosmology of cyclical rebirth, the social role of monasticism and its intervention in traditional family structures, the place of women and gender in Buddhism, the relationship between religious ideals and everyday life, the question of self-reliance versus divine assistance, and the power of images and icons.

Prof. Kevin Buckelew
MW 11:00am-12:20pm



REL 250-20 / MENA 290-5-1

Introduction to Islam

This course is an introduction to the study of Islam, one of the major religious traditions of world history. It adopts an interdisciplinary framework for understanding Islam as a lived tradition by focusing on the debates and practices that have animated Muslim religious life across time and geography. We will examine religious texts alongside material evidence, historical research, and ethnographic studies. Particular attention will be paid to the ways in which Muslims have engaged with the Qur'an and the life and legacy of the Prophet Muhammad, the practice of Islamic ritual, piety, and devotion, as the place of Islamic law in everyday life. Through this course, students will develop critical vocabulary necessary for understanding Islamic discourses and practices, as well as facility with the theoretical language in the study of religion.

Prof. Usman Hamid
TTH 9:30-10:50am



REL 261-20

Cultivating Environmental Consciousness

This course is an experimental, constructive, student-led inquiry into the idea of environmental consciousness, a term recently used by philosopher Michael Bonnett to posit an intrinsic relationship between consciousness and nature. He argues that education should be ecologized by aiming to help students develop environmental consciousness as a responsive receptivity to nature. In this course we will explore the idea of environmental consciousness by developing and carrying out nature-based practices meant to help us understand its feasibility as a basis for education. Students will collectively design, undertake, and assess these practices. In doing so we will reflect on our relationship with nature and the environment, the goals of education, conceptions of learning and assessment, the putative distinction between the secular and religious, and the relationship between educational practices and climate catastrophe.

Prof. Mark McClish

TTH 11:00am-12:20pm



REL 316-20

Religion and the Body in China

The fragility of the human body, its susceptibility to illness and death, provoked a wide array of responses among religious practitioners in pre-modern China. Some pursued supernatural longevity and even immortality through various regimes of self-cultivation. Others, by contrast, renounced the body in part or whole through dramatic acts of self-immolation. Even in death, however, many aspired to rebirth in heavenly realms where bodies do not grow old and die, but rather live forever in bliss. This course examines these various attempts to overcome death in Chinese religion—including Buddhism, Daoism, and traditions that fall between these large categories—seeking to understand how the mortality of the body was used to authorize particular modes of embodied living. *Counts towards RSG and RHM religious studies major concentration.

Prof. Kevin Buckelew
MW 3:30-4:50pm



REL 318-20

Buddhist Cultures and the Rhetoric of Violence

This course investigates the intersections between religion and violence in the context of Buddhist Asia while also considering why in many religious traditions there seem to be a link between the two. Some of the provocative questions that this course asks include: Why and how is religion involved in politics? Is Buddhism a pacifist religion? How does religion rationalize violence? How can some Buddhist leaders embrace terror as a political tool? Are the recent practices of self-immolation in Tibet acts of violence? Can non-violence be violent? *Counts towards RLP and MTJR religious studies major concentration.

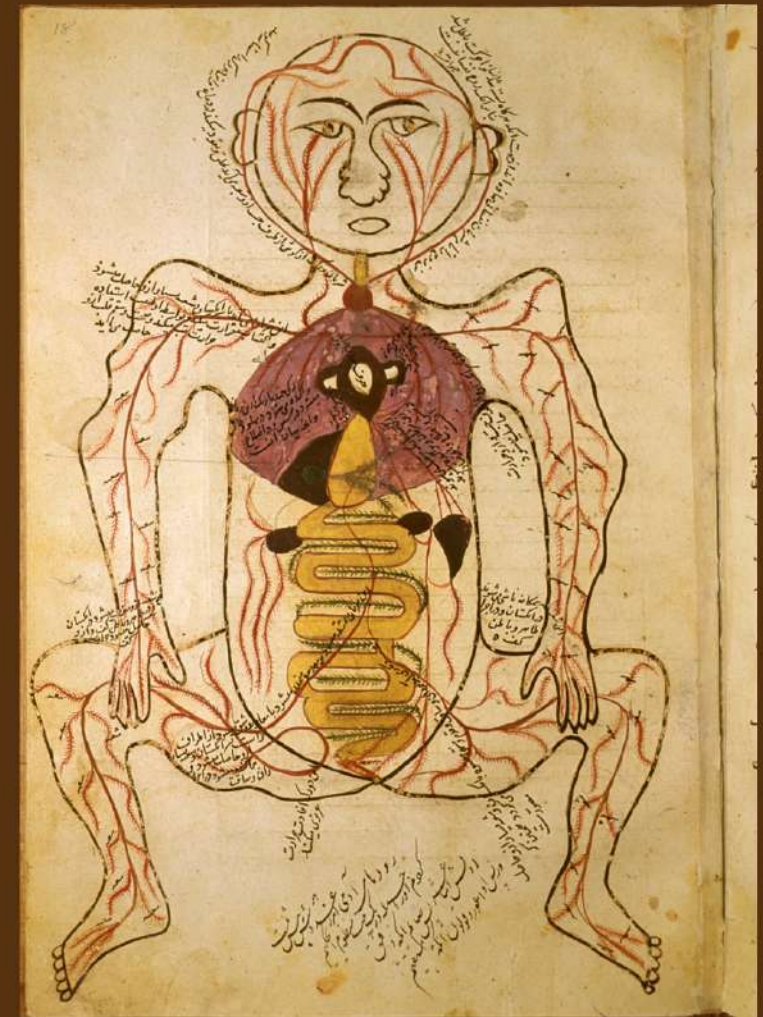
Prof. Antonio Terrone
TTH 9:30-10:50am



REL 359-21 / MENA 390-5-1 Muslim Bodies

This course examines the relationship between bodies and religion by examining Muslim embodiment of the Islam tradition in historical and contemporary contexts. Bodies are the site of much religious attention, both in terms of discourses and practices. As the instruments of ritual performance, they are subject to religious self-discipline and careful social regulation. At the same time bodies are medium through which religious experiences are made sensible and social identities materialized. As pivotal sites of religious expression and practice, bodies have been subject to a wide range of discourses, including aesthetic, devotional, ethical, erotic, legal, medieval, and political. The material reality of bodies has also drawn special attention from Muslim scholars and laity alike, with concerns ranging from health and healing, disability and difference, birth and childrearing, sex and gender, to death and dying. Finally, the bodies of Muslim holy figures have played an important role in the construction of urban environments, ritual practices, and sacred geography. *Counts towards RSG and RHM religious studies major concentration.

Prof. Usman Hamid
TTH 2:00-3:20pm



REL 371-20

Religion, Film, TV:

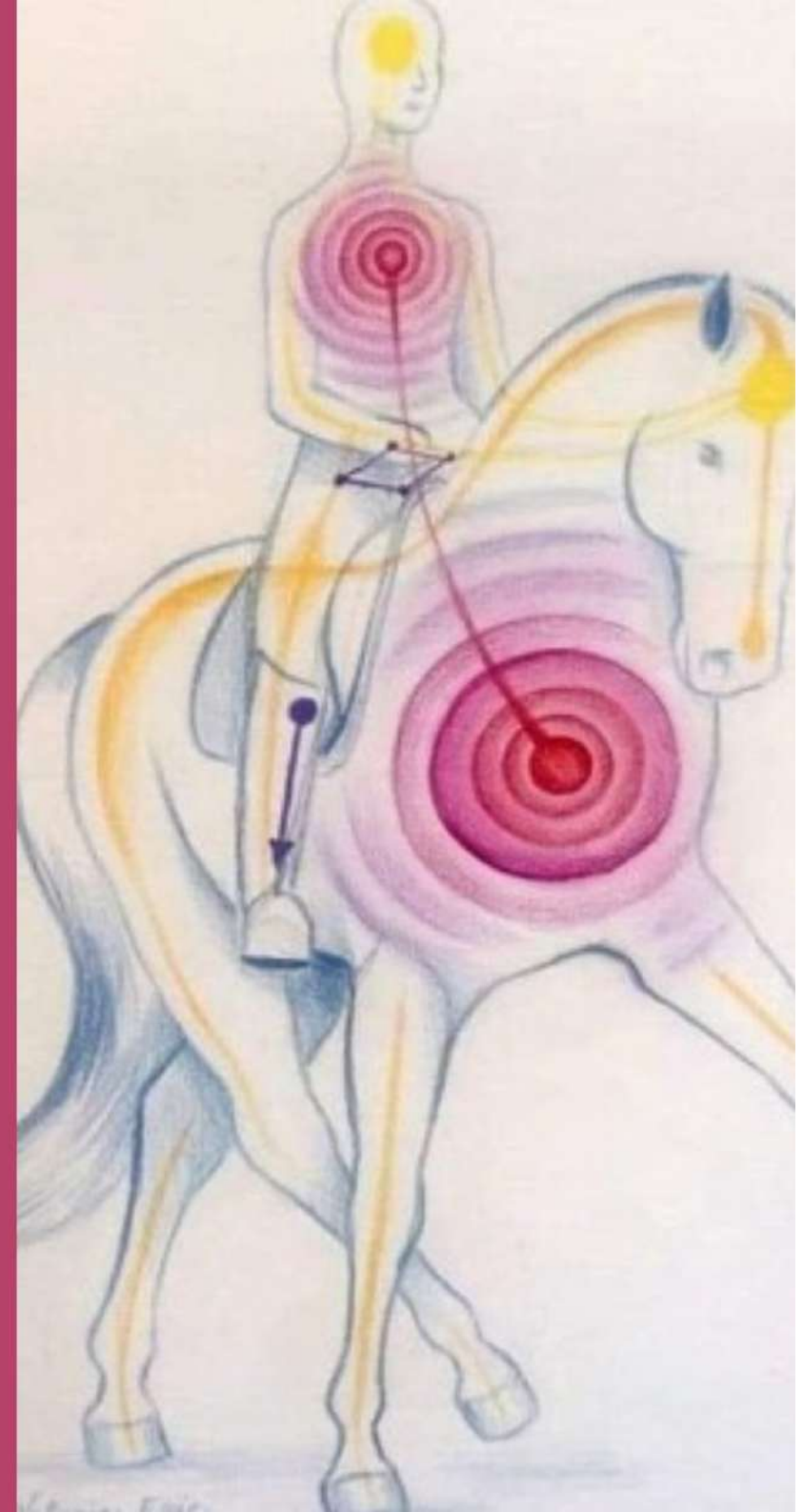
The Spirit of Horses

A fascinating “ride”! Come explore the sacred human-horse bond cross-culturally, analyzing mediations of horses in their myriad mystical, mythological, folkloric, and religious dimensions.

We examine new and ancient ways horses have played a key role in human healing, medicine, and various therapeutic applications, ranging from palliative care to treating PTSD. This course includes a Saturday class trip to an equine therapy center to learn more about the variety of ways that horses can help humans. We also study the work of trainers and clinicians who approach horsemanship as a kind of sacred vocation, devotional path, and/or spiritual discipline. Students gain skills of media analysis while practicing making effective media works of their own. [No experience with horses necessary, though not recommended for students who are allergic to equines. Required class field trip to an equine therapy center on Saturday, October 25, 2025.

* Counts towards RHM and MTJR religious studies major concentration.

Prof. Sarah Taylor
F 12-2:30pm



REL 471-20

Language and Power

How is religious authority performed, negotiated, and challenged across cultural contexts and discourse genres? In this seminar, students will engage this question through a series of ethnographic works and their own original data analysis. We will explore the intersection of religious studies, the anthropology of religion, and linguistic anthropology through scholarship that examines diverse communicative practices and ideologies.

Prof. James Bielo
T 3-3:50pm

