The Department of Religious Studies offers undergraduates from across Northwestern the opportunity to study religions as historical and cultural phenomena. This includes the scholarly exploration of religious traditions, histories, cultures, beliefs, practices, sacred texts, sacred stories, and material productions from around the world in their institutional as well as noninstitutional (“on the ground”) forms. The department’s approach is fundamentally multidisciplinary, drawing from a variety of fields and critical perspectives: anthropology, history, philosophy, ethics, sociology, and literary and cultural studies, among others.

The wide variety of undergraduate courses range from large introductory classes to advanced seminars, and there are also independent studies and a senior thesis program for qualified students. The courses cover aspects of Buddhism, Hinduism, Christianity, Islam, Judaism, African American and Native American religions, new religious movements, and religion and culture in America. Several courses are structured comparatively or thematically and address religious ideas and phenomena across cultures and contexts.

The department offers a major and minor in religious studies and a minor in Catholic studies.

In consultation with a department adviser, students majoring in religious studies select one of four concentrations:

- Global study of religion in comparative perspective
- Religion, health, and medicine
- Religion, law, and politics
- Religion, sexuality, and gender

The concentrations are designed to complement academic interests and enhance professional goals.

The minor in religious studies provides a balanced set of departmental courses, including work on general theories of religion and on the historical development of religions and their social manifestations. In the interdisciplinary minor in Catholic studies, students take courses from both religious studies and other departments and choose an area of focus within Catholic studies.

Programs of Study

- Religious Studies Major (https://catalogs.northwestern.edu/undergraduate/arts-sciences/religious-studies/religious-studies-major)
- Religious Studies Minor (https://catalogs.northwestern.edu/undergraduate/arts-sciences/religious-studies/religious-studies-minor)
- Catholic Studies Minor (https://catalogs.northwestern.edu/undergraduate/arts-sciences/religious-studies/catholic-studies-minor)

RELIGION 101-6 First-Year Seminar (1 Unit) WCAS First-Year Seminar

RELIGION 170-0 Introduction to Religion (1 Unit) Religion as it has appeared in the past and as humans continue to express it in their personal and social lives. Ethics Values Distro Area

RELIGION 171-0 Varieties of Religious Tradition (1 Unit) Introduction to a variety of the world’s major religious traditions. Ethics Values Distro Area

RELIGION 173-0 Religion, Medicine & Suffering in the West (1 Unit) Examination of religious healing ceremonies and Christian perspectives on pain and suffering in light of the meaning of physical pain in people’s everyday lives. Ethics Values Distro Area

RELIGION 200-0 Introduction to Hinduism (1 Unit) Unity and diversity of Hindu mythology, beliefs, and practices from ancient times to the present. Ethics Values Distro Area

RELIGION 210-0 Introduction to Buddhism (1 Unit) The Buddha’s life and teachings, traditions that developed from these teachings, and systems of meditation, rituals, and ethics. Ethics Values Distro Area

RELIGION 220-0 Introduction to Hebrew Bible (1 Unit) Major genres of Old Testament literature. Basic theological views and the sociopolitical history of ancient Israel. Ethics Values Distro Area

RELIGION 221-0 Introduction to the New Testament (1 Unit) Beginning, development, and content of the New Testament; its Jewish and Hellenistic environment. Ethics Values Distro Area

RELIGION 230-0 Introduction to Judaism (1 Unit) Main concepts in the theology of Judaism, main rituals and customs, and main institutions. Ethics Values Distro Area

RELIGION 240-0 Introduction to Christianity (1 Unit) Doctrine, worship, and institutions in the various branches of Christianity. Ethics Values Distro Area

RELIGION 250-0 Introduction to Islam (1 Unit) Principal beliefs and practices of Muslims set against the historic development of the faith. Ethics Values Distro Area

RELIGION 260-0 Introduction to Native American Religions (1 Unit) Diversity and common elements of Native American religious traditions; comparative study of sacred story, ritual, spiritual philosophy, and practice. Ethics Values Distro Area

RELIGION 261-0 American Religion, Ecology and Culture (1 Unit) The historical rise of environmentalism in American culture and its impact on religious thought and practice. ENVIRON, 261-0 and RELIGION 261-0 are taught together; may not receive credit for both courses. Ethics Values Distro Area

RELIGION 264-0 American Religious History from 1865 to the Great Depression (1 Unit) Topics include urban religion, African American churches, Christians and foreign policy, immigrant religion, the spiritual crisis of the 1920s, and Pentecostalism. Historical Studies Distro Area

RELIGION 265-0 American Religious History from World War II to the Present (1 Unit) Religion and the making of contemporary America, including Cold War religion, the Black Gods of the Great Migration, the rise of the Christian Right, and modern American Catholicism and Judaism. Historical Studies Distro Area

RELIGION 270-0 Introduction to Theology (1 Unit) Theology as an academic discipline with a long history of asking-in dialogue with thinkers past and present-fundamental questions about religious experience, texts, practices, and ideas. Ethics Values Distro Area

RELIGION 271-0 Theology of Love (1 Unit) The concept of love from theological, historical, philosophical, and biblical perspectives. Ethics Values Distro Area

RELIGION 272-0 Luther and the West (1 Unit) Examination of Luther’s work in the context of his life and times. Introduces basic dimensions of Western thought, showing how theology relates to broader cultural, political, social, and aesthetic issues. GERMAN 272-0
and RELIGION 272-0 are taught together; may not receive credit for both courses. Ethics Values Distro Area Historical Studies Distro Area Interdisciplinary Distro - See Rules (https://catalogs.northwestern.edu/undergraduate/arts-sciences/#schoolrequirementstext)

RELIGION 275-0 Mysticism and Spirituality (1 Unit) Examines mysticism (mystical experience, relationship, prayer, or consciousness) and spirituality (spiritual presence and practice) across religious traditions and outside traditions. Ethics Values Distro Area

RELIGION 295-0 Ahimsa: Nonviolence in South Asia and Beyond (1 Unit) Theory and practice of nonviolence in human action, taking into account ethics as well as efficacy. Emphasis on both spiritual and practical approaches to nonviolence and its usefulness in effecting spiritual development and social change. Ethics Values Distro Area

RELIGION 301-0 Hindu Epics: Mahabharata (1 Unit) Immersion in the ancient Sanskrit epic in translation and modern retellings, focusing on classical Hindu myth and theology as well as issues of justice, war, gender, and violence. Literature Fine Arts Distro Area

RELIGION 309-0 Topics in Hinduism (1 Unit) Content varies. May be repeated for credit with change of topic. Ethics Values Distro Area

RELIGION 312-0 Buddhism and Gender (1 Unit) Women, men, and gendered symbolism in Buddhism from the time of the Buddha to the present. Draws on canonical texts, narrative literature, autobiography and biography, and ethnography. Ethics Values Distro Area

RELIGION 313-0 Tibetan Religion and Culture (1 Unit) Propagation of religions in Tibet in their larger historical, cultural, and political contexts. Ethics Values Distro Area

RELIGION 314-0 Buddhism in the Contemporary World (1 Unit) An exploration of where, why, and how Buddhist practices, ideas, and iconography are spreading and being reinterpreted in the modern world. Ethics Values Distro Area

RELIGION 315-0 Buddhist Auto/biography (1 Unit) An exploration of Buddhist narratives of the self, including Sanskrit and Tibetan-language biographies and autobiographies in English translation, in conversation with literary theory. Literature Fine Arts Distro Area

RELIGION 316-0 Religion and the Body in China (1 Unit) Explores the place of the body in Chinese religion, from the ancient period to the present day. Touches on dying and the afterlife, food and drink, health and medicine, gender and family, and other themes. Ethics Values Distro Area

RELIGION 318-0 Topics in East Asian Religions (1 Unit) Content varies. May be repeated for credit with change of topic. Ethics Values Distro Area

RELIGION 319-0 Topics in Buddhism (1 Unit) Content varies. May be repeated for credit with change of topic. Ethics Values Distro Area

RELIGION 329-0 Topics in the Bible (1 Unit) Content varies. May be repeated for credit with change of topic. Ethics Values Distro Area

RELIGION 330-0 Varieties of Ancient Judaism (1 Unit) Introduction to the Judaisms that flourished from the fifth century BCE to the third century CE. Ethics Values Distro Area

RELIGION 332-0 Modern Jewish Thought (1 Unit) How Judaism dealt with modernity and the problems it posed: Spinoza, Mendelssohn, Cohen, Buber, Rosenzweig, and Levinas. Ethics Values Distro Area

RELIGION 333-0 Judaism in the Modern World (1 Unit) Radical changes that emancipation and modernity have brought to the religious expression of Judaism. May be repeated for credit. Ethics Values Distro Area

RELIGION 339-0 Topics in Judaism (1 Unit) Content varies. May be repeated for credit with change of topic. Ethics Values Distro Area

RELIGION 342-0 Christian Mystical Theology (1 Unit) Writings of mystics (e.g., Meister Eckhart, Cloud of Unknown, Julian of Norwich, Teresa of Avila) in their cultural context. Ethics Values Distro Area

RELIGION 344-0 Blood, Sex, and Justice: Issues in Christian Ethics (1 Unit) Four contemporary moral issues viewed from a variety of Christian approaches. Prerequisite: RELIGION 170-0, RELIGION 221-0, RELIGION 240-0, or RELIGION 260-0. Ethics Values Distro Area

RELIGION 345-0 Idea of Sainthood in Christianity (1 Unit) Historical and contemporary conceptions of sanctity, especially in Roman Catholicism and Eastern Orthodoxy. Ethics Values Distro Area

RELIGION 346-0 Church Architecture (1 Unit) Survey of historical and recent churches: spatial dynamics, centering focus, aesthetic impact, and symbolic resonance. Ethics Values Distro Area

RELIGION 349-0 Topics in Christianity (1 Unit) Content varies. May be repeated for credit with change of topic. Ethics Values Distro Area

RELIGION 350-0 The Qur’an (1 Unit) Islam’s sacred scripture, Muslim understandings of revelation and prophecy, and debates about the Qur’an in the contemporary world. Ethics Values Distro Area

RELIGION 351-0 Islamic Law (1 Unit) Evolution of Islamic Law from the Prophet Muhammad to the contemporary world, focusing on the impact of colonialism. Ethics Values Distro Area

RELIGION 353-0 Trends in Islamic Thought (1 Unit) Qur’anic, medieval, and modern approaches to problems in faith and social action. Ethics Values Distro Area

RELIGION 354-0 Sufism (1 Unit) The historical development of Islamic mystical traditions, with special attention to notions of mystical experience, sainthood, and devotion to the Prophet Muhammad. Ethics Values Distro Area

RELIGION 359-0 Topics in Islam (1 Unit) Selected topics in Islamic history and thought. May be repeated for credit with different topic. Ethics Values Distro Area

RELIGION 359-SA Topics in Islam (1 Unit) Selected topics in Islamic history and thought. May be repeated for credit with different topic. Ethics Values Distro Area

RELIGION 360-0 African American Religions (1 Unit) Exploration of the historical diversity of African American religious experiences and identities. Ethics Values Distro Area

RELIGION 363-0 Topics in Women and Religion in America (1 Unit) Topics, figures, events, and dynamics in the history of American women and religion. Historical Studies Distro Area

RELIGION 364-0 American Teenage Rites of Passage (1 Unit) Examination of various rites of passage experienced by US teens. Ethics Values Distro Area

RELIGION 369-0 Topics in American Religion (1 Unit) Content varies. May be repeated for credit with change of topic. Ethics Values Distro Area

RELIGION 371-0 Religion and Film (1 Unit) Content varies (e.g., films of Robert Bresson; Kieslowski’s Decalogue; Dreyer and Tarkovsky). May be repeated for credit with change of topic. Ethics Values Distro Area

RELIGION 373-0 Religion and Bioethics (1 Unit) Analysis of contemporary dilemmas in medicine and the life sciences; responses to these dilemmas from religious perspectives. Ethics Values Distro Area
RELIGION 374-0 Contemporary Religious Thought (1 Unit)  Content varies (e.g., convergence between religious paths, science and religion, politics and religion). May be repeated for credit with change of topic. Ethics Values Distro Area

RELIGION 375-0 Foundations of Christian Thought (1 Unit)  Christian interpretations of salvation, Christ, and God, from Augustine to Julian of Norwich. Ethics Values Distro Area

RELIGION 376-0 Christianity and the Making of Modernity (1 Unit)  Role of Christian thought in shaping the turbulent history of the West from the 16th to the late-18th centuries. Christianity's engagement with local and global events, from reformation to revolution, reason to romanticism. Ethics Values Distro Area

RELIGION 377-0 Christian Thought in Global Perspective (1 Unit)  Globalization of Christian thought in the 19th-21st centuries, considering religious differences, colonialism, war, and democracy. Approaches to theology in Asia, Latin America, and Africa. Ethics Values Distro Area

RELIGION 378-0 Death: Myth and Meaning (1 Unit)  Ideas, beliefs, and practices pertaining to death from a variety of ancient and modern cultures. Immortality, afterlife, care for the dying, suicide, funerary rituals, transhumanism. Ethics Values Distro Area

RELIGION 379-0 Topics in Comparative Religion (1 Unit)  Content varies. May be repeated for credit with change of topic. Ethics Values Distro Area

RELIGION 381-0 Global Catholicism in the Contemporary World (1 Unit)  Historical and contemporary global Catholicism. Topics include the church and political modernity; local saints; controversies over worship styles; Catholics and political revolutions; the Vatican; the pontificate of John Paul II. Ethics Values Distro Area Historical Studies Distro Area Interdisciplinary Distro - See Rules (https://catalogs.northwestern.edu/undergraduate/arts-sciences/#schoolrequirementstext)

RELIGION 382-0 Catholicism & Making of the Modern World (1 Unit)  16th-17th century Catholic influences on missions, colonial ventures, science, and the development of non-European history; the effects of these efforts upon Catholicism's understanding of itself and early "global culture." Ethics Values Distro Area

RELIGION 383-0 Catholic Social Ethics (1 Unit)  Ecclesiastical, academic, and popular Catholic social ethics from 1891 to the present—for example, the living wage and Catholic Worker movements, peace initiatives, liberation ethics, and immigration, environment, sexuality, and gender issues. Ethics Values Distro Area

RELIGION 384-0 Soundings in the Catholic Tradition (1 Unit)  Topics in Catholic religious thought or religious movements. May be taken multiple times with different content. Ethics Values Distro Area

RELIGION 385-0 Topics in United States Catholicism (1 Unit)  Historical and contemporary subjects in the study of Catholic culture in the United States. May be taken multiple times with different content. Ethics Values Distro Area Historical Studies Distro Area Interdisciplinary Distro - See Rules (https://catalogs.northwestern.edu/undergraduate/arts-sciences/#schoolrequirementstext)

RELIGION 386-0 Topics in Latin America Catholicism (1 Unit)  Historical and contemporary subjects in the study of Catholic culture in Latin America. May be taken multiple times with different content. Ethics Values Distro Area Historical Studies Distro Area Interdisciplinary Distro - See Rules (https://catalogs.northwestern.edu/undergraduate/arts-sciences/#schoolrequirementstext)

RELIGION 395-0 Theories of Religion (1 Unit)  Ways of critically analyzing religious experience and its meaning. Phenomenology of religion, history of religions, comparative religions. For majors only. Ethics Values Distro Area

RELIGION 396-1 Senior Seminar (1 Unit)  For honors students writing the senior thesis.

RELIGION 396-2 Senior Seminar (1 Unit)  For honors students writing the senior thesis.

RELIGION 399-0 Independent Study (1 Unit)  Reading and conferences on special subjects for advanced students. Consent of instructor required.