Today, the New Testament is widely known and accepted as Christians’ authoritative and sacred collection of texts. But roughly two thousand years ago, there were no Christians, and there was no New Testament. Rather, there existed in the eastern part of the Roman Empire a small group of people who had begun worshiping a Jewish healer and teacher as divine. It is this historical moment to which we turn in this course. We will study the people, events, and texts of the first and second centuries that shaped a small Jewish movement into the religion now known as Christianity, using as our main evidence the letters and stories of the New Testament.
INTRODUCTION TO ISLAM

This course introduces Islam, one of the major religious traditions of world history, developing a framework for understanding how Muslims in varying times and places have engaged with Islamic scripture and the prophetic message of the Prophet Muhammad through diverse sources: theological, philosophical, legal, political, mystical, literary and artistic. While we aim to grasp broad currents and narratives of Islamic history, we will especially concentrate on the origins and development of the religion in its formative period (the prophetic career of the Prophet Muhammad, the Qur’an, Islamic belief and ritual, Islamic law, and popular spirituality) and debates surrounding Islam in the contemporary world (the impact of European colonialism on the Muslim world, the rise of the modern Muslim state, and discourses on gender, politics and violence).
AMERICAN RELIGIOUS HISTORY FROM WWII TO PRESENT

This course examines major developments, movements, controversies and figures in American religious history from the 1920s, the era of excess and disillusionment, to the 1980s, which saw the revival of conservative Christianity in a nation becoming increasingly religiously diverse. Topics include the liberalism/fundamentalism controversy of the 1920s; the rise of Christian realism in the wake of the carnage of World War I; the making of the "tri-faith nation" (Protestant/Catholic/Jew); the supernatural Cold War; the Civil Rights Movement; the revolution in American Catholicism following the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) and the rise of Catholic political radicalism in the 1960s; religion and the post-1965 immigration act; the religious politics of abortion; and the realignment of American religion and politics in the 1970s and 1980s.
Mysticism is often defined in terms of some specific type of mystical experience, or a mystical relationship with the divine, or a mystical form of prayer, or mystical consciousness, all of which may be grounded in specific religious traditions but often moves beyond the boundaries of those traditions. Spirituality is a less specific term; it often refers to a sense of spiritual presence or to spiritual practices, and it may be unconnected with any religious traditions. This course examines the ways both mysticism and spirituality relate on the one hand to experience, and on the other hand to traditions. It focuses also on the ways texts (the writings of the mystics and those claiming spiritual inspiration) can be read, and introduces ways of studying these matters not only across religious traditions but outside traditions.
The unifying theme of this seminar is gender and Buddhism. We take as our point of departure Carolyn Bynum’s statement: “No scholar studying religion, no participant in ritual, is ever neuter. Religious experience is the experience of men and women, and in no known society is this experience the same.” Bearing this in mind, we will explore historical, textual and social questions relevant to gender in the Buddhist worlds of India, Tibet, and the Himalayas from the time of Buddhism’s origins to the present day. Topics covered in this course will include the roles of women, men, femininity, and masculinity in Indian and Tibetan Buddhism, Buddhism and the family, gender and the body in Mahayana Buddhism, the roles of female goddess figures such as Ākāśagāniṣṭhita, Vajrayāna Buddhism, Buddhism and sexuality, and the status of Buddhist nuns.
THE "OCCIDENTAL-ORIENTAL" DIVIDE IN ISRAEL

This course covers the history of Jews of Middle Eastern origin, commonly referred to as "Sefhardim" or "Mizrahim," in the State of Israel, a community that is often erroneously viewed as monolithic and whose contributions to Israeli culture are frequently downplayed or ignored in favor of a historiography that is more focused on the contributions of Ashkenazi Jews (Jews of northern European descent) to the country. This course will focus on the importance of the Ashkenazi-Mizrahi divide, its history, origins, meaning, and future trajectory through the lens of Mizrahi history.
The Talmud is one of the most important works of Jewish literature. For the last millennium, Talmud study has been a central part of Jewish religious and cultural practice. Despite the splintering of Judaism into different denominations, Jews the world over are unified by their commitment to studying Talmud. The Talmud is an unusual work of literature, and it has been credited as an influence on codes of law, sermons, modern works of Jewish literature, and even Seinfeld. This course will explain the Talmud's import and durability within Jewish culture while introducing students to the rigors of legal analysis that lie at the heart of most talmudic passages. The course is ideal for those interested in religion, law, logic games and questions of textual interpretation. The course will study the Talmud entirely in English translation; there is neither a language prerequisite nor an expectation of prior experience reading the Talmud.
DEATH: MYTH AND MEANING

Death is the most universal of all human experiences, and the process of coming to terms with our own death and coping with the death of others stands at the center of much of religion, philosophy, and culture since time immemorial. This class offers an exploration of central myths, beliefs, practices, questions, fears, and hopes associated with death, and ranges across different times and places, from ancient Mesopotamia to contemporary America. The purpose of this class is to get acquainted with some of the most interesting and influential ideas on death in the history of human civilization, and to acquire a kit of intellectual and conceptual tools to help us better understand our own death and the death of others as an inescapable part of life.
This course will examine the ways magic is viewed and practiced in various cultures, its relationship to mainstream religious practice in each of those cultures, and a range of theories that have been proposed regarding the relationship between magic and religion. Counts towards the Religion, Sexuality and Gender (RSG) major concentration.
This course builds on the foundation of Rel 481-1. Focusing on recent monographs in the field, the course aims to provide a genealogy of the category of religion itself as it was constituted within Euro-American intellectual and social history. It gives particular attention to ways that the category migrated within, and was mediated by, colonial and imperial networks in Asia and Africa, and to recent debates about secularity as a discourse that attempts to draw boundaries between ‘religion’ and not-religion (‘culture’, ‘politics’, ‘superstition’, and so on).