

MAJORS

# Religious Studies

## Sample Courses

### Evangelicalism in America

This course examines American evangelicalism from its rise in the 18th century to the present. Besides discussing evangelical leaders, students explore conversion, prayer, revivalism, apocalypticism, controversies over science, gender, the rise of Fundamentalism, and the emergence of the Religious Right.

### Faith, Reason, and the Existence of God

One of the “problems” facing Western religion is the existence of God. What does it mean to offer reasoned argument for something many think is a question of faith? Can theology and philosophy engage in dialogue, and on what terms?

### Martin and Malcolm: Life and Belief

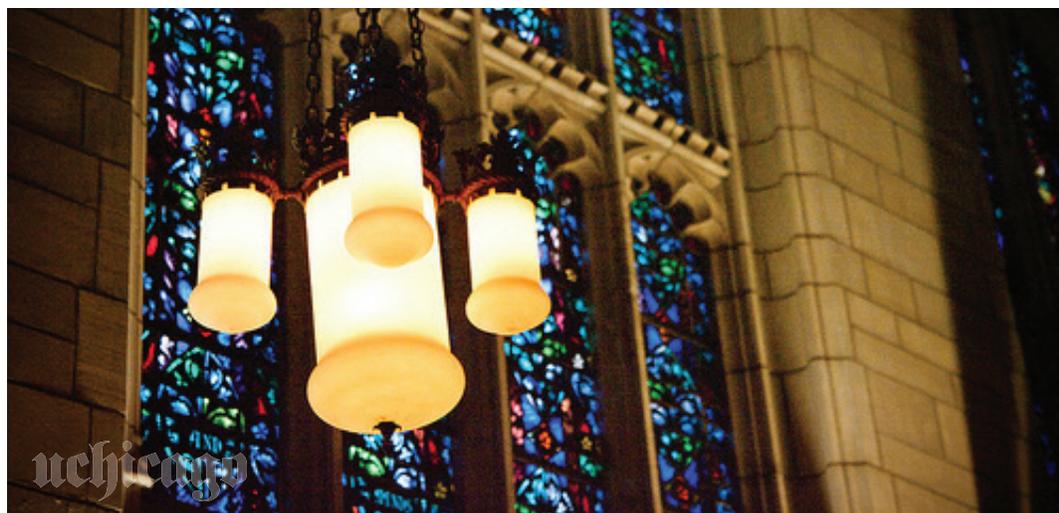
This course examines the religious, social, and personal factors behind Malcolm X and Martin Luther King Jr. Their autobiographies, trends within the United States, and larger international forces provide context for the sharp differences and surprising commonalities in their beliefs.

### Hindu Mythology

This course surveys the great mythological themes of Hinduism, beginning with the Rg Veda, continuing through the epics and the puranas, and ending with contemporary folk tellings. Assigned texts are in English.

### Saints in the Modern World

How has holiness been constructed in the Catholic world since the Reformation? Who decides who is holy and who is not? This course examines what saints do for their communities and how they are remembered.



Students benefit from the graduate Divinity School on campus, where they can take courses and partake in scholarly debate.



The religious studies major prepares students for many fields in which critical thinking and analysis are used.

The field of religious studies engages perennial questions about religion and human society by investigating religions and how they shape and are shaped by human cultures. It also considers humanity in its quest for transcendence and its relationship with the divine, and offers myriad perspectives on what effects these pursuits have had on communities and individuals.

## Curriculum

Religious studies encourages a multi-disciplinary approach to the study of the world’s religious traditions, including Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, and Judaism. For many students, the study of religion at the University of Chicago is a blend of the old and the new—rigorous preparation in languages (e.g., Arabic, Classical Greek, Hebrew, Hindi, Sanskrit, Tamil, and Tibetan) and close readings of primary texts can be combined with interdisciplinary investigations in such fields as gender studies, Jewish studies, or medieval studies.

Introduction to Religious Studies is the course that provides the gateway into the major. It focuses on some of the central questions in the field and exposes students to primary and secondary source material grouped around a set of themes, such as canon, prophecy, revelation, initiation, priesthood, sacred space, discipline, and ritual.

Because religion is expressed in many forms throughout the world’s cultures, the academic study of religion requires multiple perspectives. All religious studies majors are exposed to different sources, problems, and methodologies in the study of religion.



Students become familiar with the historical development of specific religious traditions, understand and critically engage the ethical and intellectual teachings of various religions, and make comparative appraisals of the roles that religions play in different cultures and historical periods. In their fourth year, students' course work and research culminates in a thesis paper, which focuses more narrowly on a topic from their studies.

Students also take at least one course in each of the following three major groups:

- **Historical Studies in Religious Tradition:** Such courses explore in historical context the development of particular religious traditions, including social practices, rituals, scriptures, and beliefs.
- **Constructive Studies in Religion:** These courses investigate constructive or normative questions about the nature of human life that are raised by religious traditions and include philosophy of religion, ethics, and theology.
- **Cultural Studies in Religion:** These courses introduce issues in the social and cultural contingencies of religious thought and practice by emphasizing sociological, anthropological, and literary-critical perspectives on religion, as well as by raising comparative questions about differing religious and cultural traditions, including the study of myths and mythology.

Recent course offerings include:

- Jewish Thought and Literature: Introduction to the Hebrew Bible
- Saints in the Modern World
- Cosmos and Conscience: Looking for Ourselves Elsewhere
- Indian Philosophy
- African American Religion: Themes and Issues

- Maimonides and Hume on Religion
- Hindu Mythologies of Evil
- Medieval Monasticism

### Resources

Students studying religion at UChicago benefit from the extensive resources of the Divinity School, the graduate school for the academic study of religion, which offers a master of arts in divinity program, master of arts in religious studies program, and a PhD program in ten areas: religion ethics, philosophy of religions, theology, Bible, history of Christianity, history of Judaism, history of religions, anthropology and sociology of religions, religion and literature, and Islamic studies. Undergraduate students in the religious studies major have the opportunity to enroll in graduate classes in these areas, with the permission of the instructor. Likewise, undergraduates benefit from the proximity of the Oriental Institute, as well as UChicago's Departments of History, Anthropology, languages and literatures, Sociology, and Philosophy. The scholars who research and teach at UChicago approach the study of religion broadly, utilizing a variety of theoretical approaches in their work.

UChicago has long been a center for scholarly research on religion. The Martin Marty Center for the Advanced Study of Religion at sponsors projects in all fields of religious study. These projects range from lecture series or conferences to major interdisciplinary endeavors that run for several years. Current projects include the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, Religion and the Democratic Prospect, and Religion, Ethics, and Culture. Recent conferences have addressed subjects including the practice of spiritual exercises across religious traditions, interreligious dialogue and debate, and the role of the church in the media age.

Intellectual discussion and debate of religion extends to the four journals produced at the Divinity School. *The Journal of Religion* is an interdisciplinary journal that promotes critical and systematic inquiry into the meaning and import of religion. *History of Religions*, a leading publication in its field, examines religious phenomena from prehistory to modern times. *Criterion* reflects the ongoing academic pursuits of the Divinity School's faculty and alumni. *Sightings* reports and comments on the role of religion in current events through emails and an RSS feed. The Religion and Culture Web Forum is an online forum for thought-provoking discussion on the relationship of scholarship in religion to culture and public life.

College students are invited to attend the many lectures and symposia that take place at the Divinity School and also to attend the weekly Wednesday Lunch, a community luncheon with a guest speaker invited from the wider University, the local community, and beyond. Lunch topics have addressed everything from particle physics and the search for a fifth dimension to the history of klezmer music.

### After Graduation

The study of religion will help prepare students for any career that requires critical thinking, analysis, fluent writing, and research skills. Some students use their degree as a springboard into an academic career, while others move into fields as diverse as law, medicine, journalism, consulting, ministry, and education.

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