REL 251 Topic: Black Mysticism. Explores the spirituality and devotional practices of African Americans from the last century and the contemporary period. Focus on the meditations, prayers, and music—both sacred and secular—that black people have used to promote intense religious experiences and visions. Investigates the various ritual practices black Christians and black religionists outside of institutional Christianity have employed in their attempts to see and experience the sacred. The artistry and religious thought of Bob Marley, Marvin Gaye, Howard Thurman, and Alice Walker will all be central to our exploration. *Fulfills an elective requirement in the African and African-American Studies minor.*

REL 251 Topic: Jerusalem - Religion and Politics. Jerusalem, the spiritual capital for Jews, Christians, and Muslims, is a laboratory in inter-religious, inter-ethnic living, and politicking. Introduces students to the religious history and diversity of Jerusalem, the religious beliefs of its inhabitants, especially regarding its sacredness as expressed in scriptures, poetry, and prayer, from its biblical origins until today. Topics include the interplay of Jerusalem's religious and political dimensions, messianic ideals and activism, and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict over the future sovereignty of Jerusalem. *Fulfills an elective requirement in the Jewish Studies minor.*

REL 251 Topic: Love and Sex in the Bible. This course is an introduction to the Bible with a concentration on themes and issues related to love and sex as these are depicted in biblical teachings, narratives, and poetry. We will examine narratives and poems that depict the dynamics of sexuality and erotic love, patterns of courtship and marriage in the lives of well-known personalities from this time period, attitudes and emotions such as lust, jealousy, loyalty, betrayal, obedience, and longing. We will also address teachings and laws that deal with permissible and prohibited sexual conduct. Our study will consist of three layers: the literary meaning of the biblical text, Rabbinic commentaries to the text, and contemporary perspectives and scholarship on anthropology, psychology, gender studies, and religion. Our analysis will be extensive and will include not only erotic love relationships, but also parental love, friendship, human, and divine love relationships.

REL 251 Topic: Religion and Science in Dialogue. Introduces the dialogue between religion and science, and studies the implications of current scientific theories of cosmology, evolution, and neuroscience for Eastern and Western beliefs regarding creation, God, the purpose of life, the afterlife, the soul, and human freedom. Explores spiritual teachings and practices of the body in relation to Western and Eastern medical theories. Considers cross-cultural religious views of humanity’s relationship to nature in light of ecological crisis.

REL 251 Topic: Religious and Philosophical Issues in Medicine. Considers and clarifies issues that underlie ethical decision-making in medicine, especially philosophical and religious issues concerning human self-understanding, meaning, and purpose. Probes beyond the usual medical ethics texts, in an effort to identify, define, and examine these fundamental issues and assumptions.

REL 251A Topic: Religion and Evolution. Covers theories of evolution from both Western and Eastern perspectives (Buddhism and Hinduism), and how these relate to religion. Discusses evolution in both its
natural and social aspects. Examines how locating human origins within nature has affected traditional religious understanding in the West (natural evolution), and discusses how "social" or "cultural" evolution uses evolutionary theory to claim that some human groups are more "evolved" than others.

REL 251A Topic: Buddhist Literature (C). The three canonical collections of Buddhism—Pali, Chinese, and Tibetan—contain a vast array of sutras, discourses that purport to be the word of the Buddha. In this course students will read, interpret, reflect on, critique, and discuss a number of significant Buddhist texts. We will also introduce ourselves to issues regarding the structure of the Buddhist canons, touch on questions in the theory of interpretation (hermeneutics), and consider ways in which this literature has been studied from an historical-critical perspective.

REL 251B Topic: Religion and Popular Culture. Examines the relationship between religion and popular culture. Primary focus on contemporary American culture, but also examines non-Western examples (i.e., Indian, Iranian, and Japanese). Creates understanding of how popular culture functions as a means by which to think about fundamentally religious questions: the nature of God and/or ultimate reality, the origins of good and evil, morality, eschatological and apocalyptic thought, notions of humanity’s identity and purpose, and ideas of sacrifice and redemption.

REL 251C Topic: Introduction to the Study of Religion. Introduces the academic study of religion. Begins with the history of the study of religion, or how religion came to be a topic of study for scholars. Also introduces some of the different scholarly approaches taken to the study of religion (e.g., phenomenology of religion, history of religion, anthropology of religion, textual studies, cultural studies, etc.). Closely examines some seminal studies of religion. Focus throughout the course will not be on the particular doctrines or practices of any religion, but rather on how religion has been studied.

REL 251C Topic: Liberation Theology. Examination of the theological beliefs of victims of oppression. Beginning with the assertion that religious thinking is never done in a vacuum, this course studies the relation of religious responses to political, social, and economic conditions in America, such as racism, sexism, poverty, social injustice, homophobia, and discrimination, in terms of African-American, Native American, feminist and womanist movements, and their theologies. Prerequisite: One course in religion or consent.

REL 251D Topic: African Religions and the New World Culture. African religion and culture continues to exist in the religious and cultural life of African-Americans. Using an interdisciplinary approach, course examines African-American religion, folklore, literature, music, and communication in order to assess the continuation and transformation of African culture in the world view of African-Americans.

REL 251D Topic: Contemporary Ethical Issues and Jewish Laws. Examines the Jewish legal position on controversial issues such as assisted suicide and aborting a defective fetus. Acquaints students with ancient Jewish legal sources including Torah, Mishna, Talmud, and Codes, and discusses how these sources may help shape contemporary views on a variety of issues.

REL 251G Topic: Religion and Film. A number of contemporary films contain more or less explicit messages about the meaning of life and death, the possibility of salvation, the ultimate potential of human existence, and other issues that have traditionally belonged to the domain of religious discourse. We will closely examine some of these films, reading them as texts alongside other texts. That is to say, we will
study these films in conjunction with readings of primary and secondary sources on religion. The films examined may include *Donnie Darko*, *Thelma and Louise*, and *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*, and the readings may include those on Buddhism, Gnosticism, and Taoism. The primary aim of the course is to train ourselves to be more reflective about the religious messages conveyed in contemporary film.

**REL 251G Topic: Religious Thought of Martin Luther King, Jr.** Begins an interpretation of the life and thought of Martin Luther King, Jr., in the context of the black freedom movement of the 1950s and 1960s. King’s religious development from his earliest days in the black church, his continued study of liberal theology in seminary, his embrace of Gandhian nonviolence, and the fertile interchange between his religious stance and his political engagement will receive special attention.

**REL 251H Topic: Contemporary Israel - Culture, Society, and Politics.** Israel is among the countries most reported in world news today, though much of that attention is focused on conflict, history, and religion, rather than on everyday life or the achievements of Israel’s citizenry. As one of the world’s most diverse and dynamic societies with a population that is almost equally divided between Eastern and Western cultures, Israel deserves to be better understood than through television "sound bites" and polemical documentaries. An introduction to the geography, culture, language, society, institutions, traditions, literature, music, cuisine, and the current social, demographic, political and economic issues "behind the headlines" of contemporary Israel. *Jewish Studies minor elective.*

**REL 251I Topic: Buddhist Ethics.** Discusses and assesses the ways in which Buddhism deals with ethical issues, including personal behavior in the domains of sexuality and speech, for example, and social questions regarding war, peace, and poverty.

**REL 251I Topic: Buddhist Philosophy.** Buddhism began in India some two and a half millennia ago. Throughout its development, Buddhism has offered a number of theories on the nature of the self, reality, knowledge, language, the ultimate goals of sentient existence, and the path to those ultimate goals. Course examines and considers some of these theories, especially as they developed in India. Concentrates on four forms of Buddhist philosophical discourse: Abhidharma, Madhyamaka, Yogacara, and Pramana. Goals will be to gain some familiarity with the concerns, methods, and themes of Buddhist philosophy, and to cultivate critical reflection on these concerns, methods, and themes.

**REL 251I Topic: Buddhism: Theory and Practice.** Surveys the fundamentals of Buddhist thought and practice from its formative period in India through later developments in East Asia and Tibet. The impact of Buddhist philosophy, ethics, and spiritual disciplines on various cultures in Asia and the West today will be critically examined.

**REL 251J Topic: Evangelicals, Fundamentalists, and Televangelists.** Explores the historical development of conservative and evangelical Christianity from its 19th-century beginnings to present. Topics include: relationship between Christianity and 19th-century moral controversies (slavery, abolition, women's rights and temperance movements); its response to the social gospel movement; the conflict between fundamentalism and modernism; its growth and institutional diversification since WWII; and its embrace of communications technology and political action in the contemporary period. Video and audiotapes will be used to explore our understanding of modern movements as social phenomenon.
REL 251J Topic: Religion and Science Fiction. Examines the major themes and concepts in science fiction and how these themes both extend and diverge from the traditional religious imagination as understood in the major "world religions" of Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, and Hinduism. Considers such issues as the nature of humanity and technology, humanity's multifaceted relationship with technology, and the power and persistence of the religious imagination.

REL 251K Topic: Jewish Experience in the American South: Kasha and Cornbread. A survey from 1750 to the present, told largely through biography and autobiography. Focus on the pressures of assimilation, isolation, and alienation on successive waves of Jewish immigration to the Southern United States: Spanish-Portuguese, German, and Eastern European. Also, how Jews dealt with the regional issues of slavery and racism, and other reasons why Jewish life was qualitatively different below the Mason-Dixon Line. What is Jewish life like today in the modern, suburban Sunbelt? Jewish Studies minor elective.

REL 251N Topic: Introduction to Black Religions. Explores the highly diverse religious expressions and postures among persons of African descent in the United States. Course is largely chronological, but it is not a comprehensive survey of black religious expressions. Attempts, however, to situate black religious expressions in a broader historical and cultural context in the U.S., where different groups have together created various religious worlds.

REL 251O Topic: Psychology and Asian Religion. Explores the psychology of religion from the perspective of Buddhism (including Zen and Tibetan Buddhism), Taoism, and Hinduism. A working presumption of the class is that Asian religions function more as psychological systems of healing and transformation than do the more social and political Western religions. Potential connections between Asian religions and contemporary psychology will be traced, with the goal being to identify a new psychology that can incorporate both science and religion into a comprehensive system of human understanding. No prerequisites are required in either field. Asian Studies minor elective.

REL 251T Topic: Religion and Popular Culture – "Animating Faith." Examines how various religious faiths and philosophies are portrayed in television cartoon series, in particular "The Simpsons," "South Park," "Family Guy," "Futurama," and "King of the Hill," as well as on more edgy shows on Cartoon Network's "Adult Swim." Also explores how evangelical Christian producers make use of the genre, in particular the "VeggieTales" series in videos, theaters, and on NBC-TV. Students will view and discuss episodes of these programs in class, and complete papers based on original research.

REL 251V Topic: The Lost Tribes of Israel. Explores remote Jewish communities around the world, including Africa, Asia, and South America, members of which claim to be descendents of the lost tribes of Israel. Students will gain an appreciation for Jewish multiculturalism by understanding the basic beliefs and practices of non-Western Jewish communities, as shaped in their adopted lands and in isolation from and ignorance of Western Jewish life. Through study of history, ethnographic literature, and documentaries, students will examine how these groups incorporated the dominant surrounding cultures into their original biblical/Jewish framework, and will assess the challenges in recent interactions between members of these communities and Western Jews, with a focus on those who emigrated from Ethiopia to Israel. Jewish Studies minor elective.
REL 251W Topic: The Jewish Immigrant Experience. An exploration of the cultural experience and history of Jews in New York from the beginning of the 20th century to the present. Topics include Ellis Island, the Lower East Side, Vaudeville, Hassidic life, as well as patterns of assimilation and acculturation. Culminates in a required spring break field study in New York City, where we will tour the Jewish historical sites and partake of contemporary Jewish life in the city. (See REL 251F in the Spring Break Field Study Course descriptions on page XX of this bulletin.)

REL 251Y Topic: Religion and the Body. Explores teachings, concepts, and practices pertaining to sexuality and the body that are integral to Eastern and Western religious traditions. Course goal is the critical evaluation of the role that religions play in the social construction of the body in light of changes in contemporary values, gender roles, and identities.

REL 351A Topic: Psychology of Religion. Many theories explaining or interpreting the phenomenon of religion have been offered in western thought (e.g., theological, anthropological, sociological, etc.). This course examines some psychological theories of religion from a critical point of view, which is to say, we will not only be concerned with understanding these theories, but also with moving towards arriving at normative conclusions about them -- conclusions about their validity and value. Course will be focused on works by William James.

REL 351A Topic: Semiotics. A course on the theory of signs (semiotics) and the philosophy of language, especially in terms of what it might tell us about religion. Considers the dimensions of syntactics (signs in relation to other signs), semantics (signs in relation to objects), and pragmatics (signs in relation to interpreters). Assesses accounts offered on signs, words, language, meaning, referential objects, logic, and paradox.

REL 351B Topic: Postmodernism. Introduces the study of the nature of postmodernism. Takes up a variety of texts in literature, philosophy, theology, visual media, and theory. Introduces literary and critical methods (including deconstruction, dialectics, theology, feminist, queer, and Marxist analysis), and texts from a wide range of genres (architecture, the novel, and media) within the historic epoch of the 20th century. Goal is to enhance the student’s ability to become familiar with the logic of "postmodernism."

REL 351B Topic: Religion and the Body. Explores teachings and concepts of the body found in a variety of religious traditions, and examines cultural constructions of gender roles that have resulted from them. Discussion includes: notions of the body and sexuality in creation myths; masculine and feminine images of the divine; idolatry and its critique; concepts and practices of purity/impurity; circumcision and other rituals of the body; female modesty and sexual norms; the ascetic ideal and its social implications; views of erotic love and their expressions in theological and mystical literature. Jewish Studies Minor elective course.

REL 351D Topic: Religion and Modernity. Examines religion from an interdisciplinary perspective. Focus of the course will be on exploring the meaning of modernity and how it relates to religion. Entertains questions such as: What is modernity? How does modernity represent human nature? What are the limits and possibilities of modernity? How can we reflect on the changes in religion given the transition from modernity to postmodernity? Note: This course takes the place of the Senior Independent
Study for graduating Religion majors and minors, and for Jewish Studies minors. This course is also open to all students.

**REL 351E Topic: Dead Sea Scrolls.** Broad overview of the manuscript finds of the Judean desert, particularly those from the caves near Khirbet Qumran, from 1947 to present. Examines the literary and historical context of these manuscripts and fragments, which comprise a “library” of ancient texts. Considers the relevance of the Scrolls within a broad socio-religious framework including comparative religion and the “roots” of rabbinic Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Highlights more recent controversies and debates over the publication and interpretation of the scrolls.

**REL 351E Topic: Feasting and Fasting - Comparative Religious Experience and Food.** Explores food and eating practices in religions and cultures around the world, from the perspectives of comparative religion and anthropology. Addresses topics such as food symbolism and holidays, feasts and festivals, prohibitions/taboos of food, rituals of fasting, gender roles and food preparation, sacrifices and religious experience, social justice practices such as feeding the hungry, food bountifulness as expressions of divine and human love, and eating practices as contributing to cultural/religious identity. Addresses moral issues pertaining to food practices in major world religions and tribal cultures through study of religious and legal texts that provide justifications/rationales for food practices, such as the killing and slaughtering of animals for human consumption. **Prerequisite:** One REL course. Jewish Studies minor elective.

**REL 351H Topic: Buddhist Dialogue with Christians and Jews.** People from various religions are not only becoming more aware of each other, but they are also beginning to engage in interesting and meaningful dialogue on basic life question. Introduces each of the three religions and provides for group discussion of these focused on this ongoing dialogue. Students' reflections will also be sought through journal writings and research papers. While prior knowledge of any of the three religions may be helpful, it is not required. **Prerequisite:** one REL course or consent.

**REL 351J Topic: Love and Eros in Judaism and Hinduism.** Love and Eros are among the most important human experiences and are at the heart of religion itself. Students will read love stories and poetry from the Jewish and Hindu traditions that depict the intensity, complexity, and dialectics of human and divine love. Students will also explore laws and practices pertaining to love, relationships, and sexuality that shaped values and social roles in their respective cultures. Will address dichotomy between spirituality and sexuality, raising issues pertaining to gender and the body. **Prerequisite:** One (1) REL course or consent. Fulfills elective requirement for the Jewish Studies minor.

**REL 351K Topic: Portrait of the Modern Jew in American Film and Fiction (L).** Study of popular Hollywood representations of Jews and Jewish life in contemporary films and fiction. Discusses portrayals of the immigrant experience in the lower Eastside, images of women, especially the “Jewish mother” and the Jewish American Princess, the experience of assimilation, intermarriage, and the struggle to remain Jewish in America. **Jewish Studies and Film Studies minor elective.**

**REL 251L/351L Topic: Love, Eros, and Religion.** Love and Eros are among the most important human experiences and at the heart of religion. Students will read love stories and poetry depicting the intensity, complexity, and dialectics of human and divine love from several religious traditions, and will study laws and practices pertaining to love, relationships, and sexuality that have helped shape values and social roles. Analysis of religious teachings will address the dichotomy between spirituality and sexuality,
raising issues pertaining to gender and the body. Students will gain understanding and appreciation of central religious values and practices, and compare and contrast these with contemporary western values.

REL 351N Topic: Religion and Global Politics. Since the events of September 11, the concepts of terrorism, secularism, fundamentalism, Islamism, and globalism have become political “buzzwords”. Many times, these words are used ambiguously in an attempt to evoke political and emotional response in an international context. Students will ‘unpack’ these terms by investigating the role that religion plays both in the sphere of international politics and in the formation of national identities. Students will explore the intersection of religion and politics in the Middle East (Iraq, Iran, and Saudi Arabia), South Asia (Afghanistan, India, Pakistan, and Indonesia), and the U.S. Questions such as: “How does religion influence foreign policies?” “What is the role that religious belief plays in the formation of national policies concerning human rights?” and “How does a nation’s religious identity shape its political self-understanding?” will be considered.

REL 351O Topic: Gender and Sexuality in the Christian World. Examines the ways in which religion, gender, and sexuality intersected in the world of early Christians (200-600 C.E.). Constructions of masculinity and femininity were integrally related to notions designed by religious and philosophical ideals. Examines how these cultural constructions were tied to political and social concerns. Special attention paid to representations of gender and class. Classical Studies major/minor elective and Women’s Studies minor elective.

REL 351P Topic: God in the 21st Century. Investigates ways in which the practice of religion has intersected with technological advances including the internet and cyberspace, space exploration, and artificial life. Students will examine a variety of religious responses, both positive and negative, to these advances. Questions to be explored include: How do the Internet and cyberspace communities affect how one experiences divine reality, and, further, how do they affect how humans relate to one another? What moral imperatives, if any, should influence the goals and direction of technology? Students will also explore class and gender issues relevant to these moral questions.

REL 351T Topic: Religion and Bioethics. Analyzes the ethical principles that should undergird decisions in science, medicine, and healthcare. Focuses on ethical principles developed within different ethical traditions (such as Protestantism, Catholicism, Judaism, Islam and Humanism) and on their implications for cases in abortion, death and dying, research involving human subjects, artificial reproduction, genetic engineering, cloning, and allocating resources. Several films, videotapes, and cases will be used.

REL 351U Topic: Sufi and Buddhist Mysticism. Comparative, interdisciplinary course on Buddhist and Islamic mysticism (Sufism) that examines the similarities and differences between these two major religious traditions. Topics include defining "mysticism," key figures and social practices in different Buddhist and Islamic cultures, classical works, gender and mysticism, and Western appropriations of Sufi and Buddhist mysticism.

REL 351Q Topic: Zen Buddhism. The term “Zen” may call to mind images of emptiness, sounds of silence, and thoughts of no thought. Zen Buddhism is sometimes characterized as “a special transmission outside the scriptures, directly pointing at the mind.” (How do you point at a mind?) We will try to think through just what the discourses of Zen Buddhism might mean. We will read a number of primary
sources, as well as secondary sources offering critical perspectives on Zen. We might say that from the point of view of Zen Buddhism, our approach will be misguided from the beginning.

**REL 351X Topic: Jewish Experience in the South: Kasha and Cornbread.** A survey from 1750 to the present, told largely through biography and autobiography. Focus on the pressures of assimilation, isolation, and alienation on successive waves of Jewish immigration to the Southern United States: Spanish-Portuguese, German and Eastern European. Also, how Jews dealt with the regional issues of slavery and racism, and other reasons why Jewish life was qualitatively different below the Mason-Dixon Line. What is Jewish life like today in the modern, suburban Sunbelt?

**REL 490 Senior Seminar in Religious Studies: Kabbalah and Popular Culture.** Explores the major forms of Jewish mysticism and esoteric doctrine, as expressed in the classical teachings of the Zohar, Lurianic Kabbalah, Hasidism, and in modern and contemporary Jewish mysticism. Topics of discussions include comparative mysticism, the nature of mystical experience, "New Age" spirituality, and popular culture and its influence on the spiritual quest. **Prerequisite: junior and senior Religious Studies majors and minors only.**