

Philosophy and Religious Studies

Department Location

Camille O. Hanks Cosby Academic Center – Fourth Floor

Philosophy and Religious Studies

The Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies offers two majors, one in Philosophy and the other in Religious Studies. While the two majors complement and enhance each other, they retain their separate identities and missions.

General Core Requirements

PHI 171, PHI 181, PHI 191, REL 111, REL 112 may be used to satisfy the divisional requirements in the humanities.

International/Women's Studies Requirement

Courses that satisfy the International/Women's Studies requirement are listed in the Course Sequence Booklet or on the Spelman Web page.

PHILOSOPHY MAJOR

Goals

The courses in philosophy are offered in order to help all students appreciate and interrogate philosophical inquiry in the Western world and writings of peoples of African descent and people of color around the globe—especially women. Students will also be exposed to the philosophical thought of women of African descent and the contributions of Black women to the discipline of philosophy. The program in philosophy emphasizes the development of analytical skills, critical thinking, and interdisciplinary approaches to philosophical inquiry. The major prepares students for graduate study in philosophy as well as for professional study and careers (e.g., law, journalism, medicine, diplomacy, and diverse social justice and creative projects).

Objectives

A student who has successfully completed a major in philosophy will be able to

1. understand, analyze, and critically evaluate a wide range of philosophical issues and texts in the history of philosophy globally.
2. recognize conceptual subtleties and linguistic nuances in philosophical texts.
3. engage the philosophical thought and critical interventions of peoples of African descent and people of color—especially women.
4. engage in philosophic practice within analytic, Continental, African derived and indigenous traditions of philosophy.
5. recognize informal logical fallacies as well as criteria for well-formed definitions.
6. understand and utilize tools of formal logical analysis, including derivations and truth tables.
7. use her critical skills as an engaged and independent thinker.

8. express herself clearly, cogently, and critically in her written and oral work.

Phi Sigma Tau

Phi Sigma Tau is the international Philosophy honor society. Its essential purpose is to promote ties among students in philosophy and philosophy departments in accredited institutions nationally. Phi Sigma Tau is instrumental in developing and honoring academic excellence as well as philosophical interests among its members. It awards distinction to its members with high scholarship and promotes interest in philosophy among the general collegiate public.

Major Requirements

A major in philosophy consists of 44 hours (11 courses) in philosophy. Required are five core courses totaling 20 hours: PHI 171, PHI 230, PHI 231, either PHI 181 or 201, and PHI 421 (writing intensive). In addition to these core courses, students must complete one course in four distinct areas: Post-Continental or non-Western philosophy, Metaphysics or Theory of Knowledge, Value Theory, and Women and Gender. These courses are writing intensive. The required philosophy courses and areas include:

Core Courses

- PHI 171 Introduction to Philosophy (4)
- PHI 230 and 231 History of Western Philosophy (8)
- PHI 181 or 201 (Logic) (4)
- PHI 421 Directed Reading and Independent Study in Philosophy (4)

Areas

- Area I: Post-Continental or Non-Western Philosophy (4)
- Area II: Metaphysics or Theory of Knowledge (4)
- Area III: Value Theory (4)
- Area IV: Women and Gender (4)
- Electives (8)

TOTAL: 44

Minor Requirements

The Department Philosophy also offers a minor in philosophy, which can be adapted to the student's philosophical interests and major field of study. A minor in philosophy consists of 24 hours in philosophy. The required philosophy courses include the following:

- PHI 171 Introduction to Philosophy (4)
- PHI 181 or PHI 201 (Logic) (4)
- PHI 230 and 231 History of Western Philosophy (8)
- Philosophy Electives (8)

TOTAL: 24

Philosophy Course Descriptions

PHI 171 – INTRODUCTION TO PHILOSOPHY (4)

An introduction to some of the major philosophical questions and authors in the history of the discipline. Encourages the development of critical thinking on philosophical issues.

PHI 181 – PRACTICAL REASONING (4)

An introduction to the basic principles and procedures of reasoning. Main topics include recognition of arguments, premises and conclusions, analysis of the structure of arguments, evaluation of arguments, validity and soundness, and informal fallacies.

PHI 191 – HONORS PHILOSOPHY SEMINAR (4)

An introduction to ancient and modern philosophy. Reading intensive course, concentrating on six dialogues by Plato, Descartes' *Meditations* on First Philosophy, selected readings from Suzuki's *Zen Buddhism*, and certain chapters of Nordenstam's *Sudanese Ethics*.

PHI 201 – FORMAL LOGIC (4)

An introduction to elements of formal logic. Truth tables, logical operators, valid argument forms, the propositional calculus, applications of formal logic in computer science, etc.

PHI 220 – INTRODUCTION TO PHILOSOPHY (4)

An introduction to some of the major philosophical questions in the Western tradition. Encourages the development of critical thinking on philosophical issues.

PHI 230 – HISTORY OF WESTERN PHILOSOPHY: ANCIENT AND MEDIEVAL (4)

A survey of the history of Western philosophy from its origins in Greece to the end of the Middle Ages. Selected texts of such major figures as Plato, Aristotle, St. Augustine, and St. Thomas Aquinas. Prerequisite: A previous course in philosophy or permission of instructor.

PHI 231 – HISTORY OF WESTERN PHILOSOPHY: MODERN (4)

A survey of the history of Western philosophy from the Renaissance to the present. Selected texts of such major figures as Descartes, Locke, Berkeley, Hume and Kant. Prerequisite: A previous course in philosophy or permission of instructor.

PHI 240 – AFRICAN AMERICAN PHILOSOPHY (4)

A critical examination of the moral and philosophical questions raised in the discourse on the experiences of African Americans. Prerequisite: A previous course in philosophy or permission of instructor.

PHI 304 – SEMINAR IN ETHICS (4)

An advanced course in ethics and ethical theory. May involve a detailed study of some major writers in ethical theory (such as Plato, Aristotle, Nietzsche, Kant, Sartre) or a systematic examination of some critical issues in ethics. Prerequisite: A previous course in philosophy or permission of instructor.

PHI 375 – TAOISM – CHINESE PHILOSOPHY

A study of Taoism, emphasizing the writings of Taoist sages Lao Tzu and Chuang Tzu and highlights the similarities and differences between Eastern and Western philosophy. Prerequisite: PHI 131 or PHI 220 or permission of the instructor.

PHI 381 – AESTHETICS (4)

An examination of theories of, and approaches to, art, literature, and music. Topics: the nature of art, evaluation of art, implications of art, etc. Prerequisite: A previous course in philosophy or permission of instructor.

PHI 382 – SOCIAL AND POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY (4)

An examination of the major issues of social and political philosophy: the legitimacy of government, individual autonomy, justice and equality. Prerequisite: A previous course in philosophy or permission of instructor. (Writing Intensive)

PHI 383 – EPISTEMOLOGY (4)

An examination of some of the central issues in the theory of knowledge. Topics may include skepticism and certainty, fallibilism, foundationalism, coherentism, and pragmatism. Prerequisite: A previous course in philosophy or permission of instructor.

PHI 384 – METAPHYSICS (4)

An examination of some of the central questions concerning the nature of reality. May involve close study of major metaphysical works in Western philosophy, e.g., Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, Hegel's *Logic*, Kant's *Critiques*. Prerequisite: PHI 220, a previous course in philosophy or permission of instructor.

PHI 391 – HONORS SEMINAR IN PHILOSOPHY AND LITERATURE (4)

An examination of philosophical themes in literature and the philosophical dimensions of literary interpretation. Involves close study of a work by Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides, St. Augustine, Shakespeare, Dostoevsky, Kafka, Tolstoy, Sartre, Mishima, and Toni Morrison. Prerequisite: A previous course in philosophy or permission of instructor (Writing Intensive)

PHI 392 – ON THE ORIGINS OF POSTMODERNISM (4)

A seminar devoted to the reading of contemporary postmodern philosophy and its antecedents. Thinkers covered may include Kant, Hegel, Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Foucault, Derrida and Butler. This course is an honors elective. Prerequisite: A previous course in philosophy or permission of the instructor.

PHI 400 – LATIN AMERICAN PHILOSOPHY (4)

An exploration of the history of Latin American philosophy. This includes examination of the following: pre-colonial and early colonial thought, role of Enlightenment, humanism, positivism, traditionalism, rationalism, political/revolutionary thought, and some twentieth century thought. This course also will explore native and African thought as it converges, emerges or relates to the aforementioned periods. Prerequisite: A previous course in philosophy or permission of instructor (Writing Intensive).

PHI 421 – DIRECTED READING AND INDEPENDENT STUDY IN PHILOSOPHY (4)

An approach to the study of philosophy through a comprehensive reading, writing, and discussion about pertinent philosophical issues. Prerequisite: Majors must have completed at least three courses in philosophy and obtained special permission of instructor via completion of petition form available in the department's office. Non-majors interested must petition the department via completion of petition form available in the department's office. (Writing Intensive)

PHI 431 – SPECIAL TOPICS (4)

Seminars devoted to specialized issues, topics, or philosophically related fields. Prerequisite: A previous course in philosophy or permission of instructor.

PHI 431 A – ECOLOGICAL AESTHETICS, ETHICS AND PRAXIS (4)

A study of various perspectives in environmental ethics and aesthetics, including individualist and holistic approaches, and examine some contemporary ecophilosophies and how representations of the natural world contribute to our understanding of environmental problems. Among the issues discussed include the beauty of nature; deforestation; world population growth; climate change; development and economic globalization; and environmental justice.

PHI 490/491 – HONORS THESIS (4, 4)

A departmentally supervised research project of a philosophy major. Students must be members of the Honors Program. Prerequisite: Students must present a proposal to the Department (form is available at the department's office) and gain special permission to work with one of its faculty.

RELIGIOUS STUDIES MAJOR**Goals**

The Religious Studies program at Spelman College offers students the opportunity to engage in the academic, interdisciplinary study of religion. Courses explore the nature of religion as a significant phenomenon of human life. Religion is studied by analyzing sacred texts, by examining the histories of distinct religious traditions, and by exploring the general interaction of religion with social and cultural life in diverse settings. Focus is also placed on the roles of women in religions and on the meanings of religion in the African Diaspora.

Objectives

Upon completion of a major in religion, a student should be able to

1. demonstrate understanding of the academic study of religion,
2. identify and analyze various methods in the study of religions,
3. understand historical developments of a variety of religious traditions, including the roles and statuses of women within the traditions,

4. demonstrate knowledge of the critical developments of a variety of religious traditions in the African Diaspora,
5. demonstrate critical writing and reasoning skills, especially in regard to roles of religion in social life,
6. identify and critically assess her participation in religious traditions and institutions as a Black woman.

Religious Studies Course Descriptions

REL 111 – INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY OF RELIGION (4)

This course explores the nature and role of religion as a source of meaning in human life. It combines academic study of religion with analysis of beliefs, symbols, ideas, and practices of African/African-derived religions, and at least two other religious traditions. Students examine a variety of dimensions and ways of being religious within each tradition.

REL 112 – WOMEN AND RELIGIONS (4)

This course aims to introduce students to various views and evaluations of religious traditions by contemporary women scholars. Religious traditions include Buddhism, Confucianism, Islam, Christianity, Judaism, and Shamanism. The focus of this course is to explore how religious traditions have been the source of both oppression and liberation in the lives of women by examining religious teachings as well as attitudes about the roles of gender, sexuality, and other issues concerning women. (Area III)

REL 202 – INTRODUCTION TO OLD TESTAMENT (4)

This course is an introduction to the critical study of the ancient texts of the Old Testament/Hebrew Bible. The course's basic aim is to provide students with a myriad of tools that will help familiarize them with the culture, character, and the contents of the Old Testament/Hebrew Bible and to become informed and responsible interpreters of it. (Area I)

REL 204 – INTRODUCTION TO NEW TESTAMENT (4)

This course is an introduction to both the contents that make up the New Testament and the Greco-Roman social world that shaped and gave rise to the books of the New Testament. (Area I)

REL 209 – WOMEN AND THE BIBLE (4)

The Judeo-Christian tradition is highly male oriented with women playing secondary roles. The course examines the role biblical women played in the development of biblical history with emphasis on the contribution of Africa and African women of the Bible. The introduction of womanist theology is brought into consideration as students examine both historical and contemporary roles of women. (Area I)

REL 221 – INTRODUCTION TO THE QUR'AN (4)

The Qur'an is the primary repository of the beliefs, values, and rituals of Islam permeating the lives of over one billion people worldwide. Yet for most non-Muslims, the Qur'an remains a closed book. This course introduces students to the main features, structure, and contents of the Qur'an as a text and to the ways in which it has been received, understood, interpreted, and contested by Muslims for over 1,400 years. (Area I)

REL 222 – INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY OF ISLAM (4)

This course is an introduction to Islam. It explores Islam and the voices that present it to the world. Islam embodies a vision that shapes spirit and society. This course seeks to identify and analyze major themes that reflect Islam's persistent presence over a period of 1400 years and its impact on souls and societies from Mecca to America and beyond. (Area II)

REL 223 – WOMEN AND ISLAM (4)

This course examines the experiences of Muslim women across generation and their ethnic background. Using Muslim women's voices as the frame of analysis, students examine how Islam signifies multiple, often competing, expressions of faith and practice. Students will analyze how women's distinct cultural and economic locations influence how they interpret the Qur'an and Hadith, the two primary sources of Muslim practice. (Area II)

REL230 INTRODUCTION TO AFRICAN INDIGENOUS RELIGIONS AND CULTURE

This course is a general introduction to belief systems, cultural environs, and traditional ethics of African Indigenous Religions (AIR). The course explores concepts of the creator, divinities, ancestors, other spirit powers, and women in African Indigenous Religions. Methods of study include lectures, reading, class discussion, small group activity, 6Jm, critical writing, and field study. This course fulfills the Humanities core curriculum requirement.

REL 237 – AFRICAN DERIVED RELIGIOUS TRADITIONS IN THE AMERICAS (4)

This course is an intensive introduction to African derived religions from an ethnographic perspective. It begins with an introduction to the anthropological study of religion, including interpretive concepts such as sacred and syncretism. The course will critically interrogate these concepts during the semester through concrete ethnographic readings. The

Religious Studies Honor Society

Theta Alpha Kappa

Theta Alpha Kappa is the only national honor society that serves those involved in the study of religion and/or theology at both the baccalaureate and post-baccalaureate levels. It honors students who have shown promise for continued growth in the study of religion. The society aims to further the study of Religion by encouraging research, good teaching, publication and intellectual and social exchange among students, teachers, and writers in the field as well as with persons in other scholarly disciplines.

Major Requirements

A major in religious studies consists of 44 hours. Four core courses totaling 16 hours include REL111 Introduction to Religion, PHI220 Introduction to Philosophy, REL380 Theory and Methods in Religious Studies, and REL480 Senior Project. In addition to these core courses, each major must complete at least two courses in two different religious traditions: two historical introductions to two different traditions from Area II and two corresponding electives from either Area I, II, or III. Each major must complete at least one course in each of the three curricular areas. The remaining courses shall be electives.

- REL 111 Introduction to the Study of Religion (4)
- PHI 220 Introduction to Philosophy (4)
- REL 380 Theory and Methods in Religious Studies (4)
- REL 480 Senior Project (4)
- Area I Sacred Texts: at least one courses in this area is required (4)
- Area II History of Religions: at least two courses in this area are required (8)
- Area III Religion and Culture: at least one course in this area is required (4)
- Corresponding Electives (4-8)
- Open Electives (4-8)

TOTAL: 44

Minor Requirements

The religious studies minor is designed for students seeking to expand knowledge of religious studies to complement their major interests in other disciplines. The minor also will provide students with the option of continuing their education in a variety of religious studies programs. The religious studies minor consists of five courses (20 credit hours):

- REL 111 Introduction to the Study of Religion (4)
- PHI 220 Introduction to Philosophy (4)
- One historical introduction to a religious tradition from Area II (4)
- One corresponding elective from any area in the same religious tradition (4)
- One religious studies elective (4)

course pays particular attention to religions in Brazil, Haiti, Cuba, and the United States, as well as to some of their West and Central African inspirations. (Area II)

REL 240 – HISTORY OF AFRICAN-AMERICAN CHRISTIANITY (4)

The course studies the history of the Black church in America beginning with its African roots, its slave origins, its development over the decades and its contemporary impact on American society. The study of Black theology, the role of women in the Black church, liberation theology and the Civil Rights Movement are included in the study. (Area II)

REL 245 – INTRODUCTION TO BLACK THEOLOGIES (4)

Black theology represents the emergence of a new paradigm in contemporary Christian life and thought. This course examines the origin and development of black theology in the 1960s and identifies the social and historical context of racism, exploitation, and oppression that gave rise to this new, ground-breaking interpretation of Christianity in the United States. Prerequisite: Either REL111, REL112, or permission of the instructor. (Area II)

REL 267 – INTRODUCTION TO WOMANIST AND FEMINIST THEOLOGIES (4)

This course is an introduction to the growing body of literature that explores women's reflections on religion, theism, sacred texts, and religious and moral traditions. Themes of study include, but are not limited to, women's experiences, patriarchy in religion and society, women's moral agency, and women's religious participation. Prerequisite: REL111 or REL112. (Area III)

REL 270 – INTRODUCTION TO EASTERN RELIGIOUS TRADITIONS (4)

This course aims to introduce students to a variety of Eastern religious traditions, such as Buddhism, Confucianism, and Taoism. The goal of this course is to provide knowledge on Eastern religious traditions and to explore different perspectives and positions in these traditions. Although primary focus will be given to religious practices and institutions in the East Asian context, this course also will explore how these religious traditions have been affected by their introduction to North American culture. (Area II)

REL 278 — WOMEN IN EASTERN RELIGIOUS TRADITIONS (4)

This course explores how symbols, teachings, rituals, and practices in traditions of Buddhism, Confucianism, Daoism and Shamanism have affected the lives of women. Focusing primarily upon religious practices and institutions in the East Asian culture, the course also explores how these religious traditions have been affected by the North American culture. (Area II)

REL 283 – CONTEMPORARY RELIGIOUS ISSUES (4)

This course explores the interaction of religious ideas and religious traditions with contemporary social issues. Topics include religion and technology, religion and human sexuality, religion and health, religion and economics, religious pluralism, and religion and politics. Prerequisite: REL111 or REL112. (Area III)

REL 285 – RELIGION, WOMEN, AND VIOLENCE IN GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE (4)

This class aims to investigate forms of violence – e.g., sexual, spiritual, physical, economic violence – with which women wrestle today in the global context and to explore various ethical and theological responses to them. The course examines cultural and religious responses to and/or justifications for violence. Diverse theoretical approaches will be explored. Issues include “domestic violence,” global sex trade, poverty, female genital mutilation, and military violence. In this course, “religion” includes primarily Christianity, Islam, and Buddhism. (Area III)

REL 300 – SPECIAL TOPICS (4)

Topics vary and are announced in the semester offered. Specific courses are listed by number 300 and by letter A and B.

REL305 THE BIBLE, SEX, AND SEXUALITIES

This course is designed to help students become familiar with varieties of ways of approaching the biblical text its treatments of issues which relate to sex and sexualities. The course will explore passages in both the Hebrew Bible and New Testament where sexual acts are either described, performed, and/or discussed by characters in the text.

REL 310 – JUDAISTIC STUDIES (4)

An in-depth exploration of the beliefs and practices of normative Judaism, this course emphasizes the Jewish view of God and humans. A variety of Jewish literature will be studied, including Talmudic and con-

temporary Jewish thought and contemporary ideas within Judaism. Prerequisite: REL111, REL112, or REL202. (Area II)

REL 312 – SURVEY OF CHRISTIANITY (4)

This course studies the development of Christianity, beginning with the life of Jesus in the four Gospels and the origin of Christianity growing out of that life and the subsequent development of the Church through the work of the apostles and their successors. The course will follow the history of Christianity down through the ages, distinguishing between the Church of the West, namely Roman Catholicism, and the Orthodox Church of the East. Theologies that grew out of Christianity will also be considered. Prerequisite: REL111 or REL112. (Area II)

REL 314 – CHRISTIAN ETHICS (4)

This course is an introduction to moral theory and ethical reflection, primarily within the traditions of Christianity. Students examine theories, language, and methods of moral reasoning; explore contemporary ethical issues; and engage in moral reflection. An important element of the course is introducing students to the complex and often ambiguous nature of moral reasoning and ethical decision-making. Prerequisite: REL111 or REL204. (Area II)

REL 317 – LOVE AND CHRISTIAN TRADITION (4)

This course explores historic and contemporary statements about love within the traditions of Christianity. Students will examine the traditional view of Christian love as primarily self-giving; challenges to the traditional view, especially the assertion that true Christian love should express mutuality and reciprocity; and assertions that eros must be considered in all discussions of love. Prerequisite: REL111 or REL204. (Area II)

REL318 RELIGION AND SEXUALITY: A SURVEY

This is course explores the interrelationship of religion and sexuality by exploring different perspectives on sexuality within various religious traditions. A number of topics will be discussed, including history of sexuality, sexual identity, sexual desire, marriage, sexual ethics, and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer issues.

REL 321 – ISLAMIC CIVILIZATIONS (4)

This course will explore the evolution of the Muslim faith from its beginnings as a small local Arab religion to a truly global faith stretching from the Atlantic Ocean to the gates of China. In particular, students explore the development of social, cultural and intellectual institutions in the construction of a diverse yet unified Muslim world. Students also examine issues such as gender, class, race and inter-religious relations. Prerequisite: Either REL111, REL112, REL222, or REL223. (Area II)

REL 323 – RACE AND AMERICAN ISLAM

This course will examine how race has helped to shape a distinctive American Islam. Focusing on the experiences of African American, South Asian, and Arab Muslims, the course will examine both black and immigrant responses to American racism. The course will also examine the intersections of race, class, and gender. How does the overlap of race-class-gender identities create contrasting notions of American Islam? (Area III)

REL 380 – THEORY AND METHOD IN RELIGIOUS STUDIES (4)

This seminar critically examines methodological questions and interpretive paradigms in the academic study of religion. Socio-historical, philosophical, anthropological, sociological, and moral methods will be considered. Students begin to design their own creative research project. Juniors Only. Prerequisite: REL111 and PHI220.

REL 400 – DIRECTED STUDY (1-4)

This course is open to religious studies majors and minors who wish to engage in independent study in areas that regular course offerings do not cover. Under the guidance of an instructor, the student engages in comprehensive reading, writing, and discussion. Religious studies majors and minors only. Permission of instructor is required.

REL 480 – SENIOR PROJECT (4)

This is the capstone course in the department. An intensive senior-year research and writing experience, this course includes independent research and analysis and a formal presentation. Seniors Only. Prerequisite: REL111, PHI220, and REL380.

REL 490/491 – HONORS THESIS (4,4)

This is a departmentally supervised research project of a religious studies major. Students must be members of the Honors Program.