Religious Studies Major (BA)

A Bachelor of Arts degree (120 credits) consists of Core Curriculum (30 credits) and at least one major (36-60 credits), as well as minors and/or elective courses of the student’s choosing.

The Bachelor of Arts in Religious Studies is a 36-credit major in which students explore religion in a variety of ways, with an emphasis on contemplative practices and traditions. Course offerings include African, Buddhist, Christian, Hindu, Jewish, Muslim, and Sufi traditions. Students have the opportunity to develop inner resources to meet life’s challenges, and interreligious dialog skills to relate to diverse traditions and beliefs. All students must take a series of 12 credits that introduce the study of religion and contemplative practice. Students also choose 9 credits from Religious Traditions courses, which serve as introductory studies of major world religions, 6 credits from Contemporary Issues in Religion courses, and 9 credits from Contemplative Practice courses.

Departmental Policies

Please consult with your academic advisor to plan your schedule in the program. For additional policies, please see the Religious Studies Student Handbook on MyNaropa. Undergraduate students may petition to take MA courses in Buddhism in their junior or senior year with permission of the instructor.

Religious Studies Requirements

Required Courses

Gateway

Choose 6 credits

- REL150 Buddhist Journey of Transformation: An Introduction (3)
- REL210 Religion & Mystical Experience (3)
- REL247 Embodying Sacred Wisdom: Modern Saints (3)

Milestone

- REL351 Theories of Alternative Spiritualities and New Religious Movements (3)

Religious Traditions Courses

Choose 9 credits

- REL229 Contemplative Judaism (3)
- REL240 Foundations of Buddhism (3)
- REL314 Contemplative Islam: An Introduction to Its History, Thought, and Practice (3)
- REL321 Kabbalah and Consciousness (3)
- REL323 Religious Experience in Africa: Sacred Cosmos, Ritual, and Community (3)
- REL325 Contemplative Christianity (3)
- REL334 Hindu Tantra (3)
- REL338 Sufism: An Introduction to its History, Thought, and Practice (3)
- REL345 Zen Buddhism (3)
- REL346 Wisdom and Compassion: The Buddhist Path (3)
- REL349 Tibetan Buddhism: Inside the Mystique (3)
- REL355 Introductory Sanskrit: The Language of the Gods (3)
- REL376 Inner Oral Tradition of the Torah (3)
- TRA453 Yoga History, Theory, and Philosophy (3)

Contemporary Issues in Religion Courses

Choose 6 credits

- REL190 Special Topics in Religious Studies (1-3)
- REL212 Queer Theory, Feminism, and Religion (3)
- REL312 Spiritual Models of Social Action (3)
- REL348 Flight of the Swans: Dharma Comes West (3)

Contemplative Practice Courses

Choose 9 credits

- REL158W The Breeze of Simplicity: Meditation Weekend (1)
- REL160 Meditation Practicum I: Freeing the Mind (3)
- REL170 Meditation Practicum II: Igniting Compassion (3)
- REL250 Spirituality and Creative Expression (3)
- REL255W Opening the Heart: Meditation Weekend (1)
- REL258 Contemplative Practice Intensive (1.5-6)
- REL271 Christian Prayer and Mystical Practices (3)
- REL345 Zen Buddhism (3)
- REL390W Shambhala Training Level I: The Art of Being Human (1)
- REL391W Shambhala Training Level II: Birth of the Warrior (1)
- REL392W Shambhala Training Level III: Warrior in the World (1)
- REL393W Shambhala Training Level IV: Awakened Heart (1)
- REL394W Shambhala Training Level V: Open Sky (1)
- TRA133 Yoga I (3)
- TRA463 Meditation in Yogic and Tantric Traditions: A Practicum (3)

Capstone

- REL485/TRA485 BA Wisdom Traditions Retreat (1)
- REL489/TRA489 BA Wisdom Traditions Capstone (2)

Total Credits: 36

Religious Studies Course Listings

(REL)

REL150

Buddhist Journey of Transformation: An Introduction (3.0)

This course traces the transformation of emotional and conceptual confusion into wisdom on the Buddhist path. Beginning with insights into how humans generate confusion and habitual patterns, we extend that insight to develop compassion and skill in working with others and discover skillful means within our confused states in the present moment. Students are introduced to the rich diversity of Indo-Tibetan Buddhist "three vehicles" within the context of Buddhist history, texts, and traditions.
REL156W
Zen Intensive Weekend (1.0)
The teaching and practice of Zen Buddhism assumes that there is a big mind present in all mental and physical activities, that this big mind can be realized, and that its realization can be matured. The class will look at how this Zen paradigm, its teachings, practices, and realization, can be a personal vision and part of professional contemporary psychology. Cross-listed as REL52W.

REL157W
Theravada Vipassana Weekend (1.0)
When mindfulness meditation is practiced, the exquisite ordinariness of the movement of breath, of the sensation of the body sitting on the earth, and of the busyness of the mind and emotions is discovered. This intensive weekend introduces insight meditation, “vipassana,” from the Theravada Buddhist tradition of Southeast Asia. This course includes mindfulness practice in sitting, walking, and daily life through short talks, guided meditations, and the practice of “noble silence.” Cross-listed as REL501W.

REL158W
Breeze of Simplicity: Meditation Weekend (1.0)
This course introduces spiritual practices, meditation, and various themes from specific spiritual traditions. The spiritual tradition will vary depending on the visiting instructor presenting. Beginning or experienced students are welcome and are guided through the presentations. The weekend includes lectures, discussion, meditation, and/or other spiritual practices. Cross-listed as REL504W.

REL160
Meditation Practicum I: Freeing the Mind (3.0)
Students are introduced to sitting meditation practice drawn from the Tibetan Buddhist tradition of shamatha-vipashyana. Weekly lectures emphasize experiential aspects of the practice, involving such topics as the discovery of impermanence, working with emotions, and the cultivation of maitri (loving-kindness). The course includes weekly discussion groups, individual meetings with a meditation instructor, daily meditation practice, midterm, and final oral exams.

REL170
Meditation Practicum II: Igniting Compassion (3.0)
This course continues the instruction in meditation practice begun in the fall semester, emphasizing Mahayana practice, including the generation of an enlightened attitude (bodhicitta), the practice of the perfections (paramitas), the training of the mind (Lojong), and the exchange of self and other (tonglen). The course includes midterm and final oral exams. Prerequisite: REL160 or TRA100.

REL190
Special Topics in Religious Studies (1.0-3.0)
The Special Topics course explores topics of general focus and relevance to the field of religious studies, geared toward the research interests of the faculty. Specific topics are announced the semester the course is offered.

REL210
Religion and Mystical Experience (3.0)
This class explores the essential core of the world’s wisdom traditions: their mystical teachings; rituals; and esoteric practices. Special attention will be given to the nature of mystical experience characterized by a direct encounter with Ultimate Reality or the Divine and to the variety of its manifestations in and out of the world’s major religious traditions.

REL212
Queer Theory, Feminism, and Religion (3.0)
Religion has greatly influenced our experiences as gendered beings, in the areas of sexuality, power, gender roles, personal identity, privilege, and wisdom. Feminism has identified the biases and abuses of patriarchy and sought to rectify them. It has also birthed the GLBT movement and queer theory. How have these efforts spoken to the spiritual subjectivities of women, sexual minorities, or men in these traditions? On what terms can gender be appreciated and valued? This course traces the historical evolution and cultural influences of patriarchy, feminism, and gay liberation on religious experience, as well as religion’s impact on the formation of gender roles.

REL229
Contemplative Judaism (3.0)
This course explores the contemplative teachings and practices of traditional Judaism. We will study sacred texts such as the Hebrew Bible and the Talmud, learn about classical Jewish rituals and methods of prayer, and explore contemplative approaches to the Hebrew calendar and the holiday cycle. Our exploration of these topics is approached with an eye toward understanding how these teachings and practices are engaged as a spiritual path. Prerequisite: COR110. Cross-listed as REL 529.

REL240
Foundations of Buddhism (3.0)
An introduction to Buddhism, including a survey of Buddhist history, philosophy, and meditation. Special emphasis is placed on the basic Buddhist teachings and perspectives as expressed in the life of the Buddha, the four noble truths, and the Buddhist understanding of the mind. The course examines the close relationship between Buddhist thought and the central spiritual discipline of meditation. Grading criteria includes a final paper.

REL247
Embodying Sacred Wisdom: Modern Saints (3.0)
An exploration of the human thirst for spiritual experience and transformation through the studies of biographies of nineteenth and twentieth-century contemplatives from several selected religious traditions, both Eastern and Western. Through examining the spiritual and religious journey of saints and their relationships with their traditions, students learn the diversity of religious traditions of sainthood. How do the journeys of their saints relate to our personal journeys? Readings include sacred biographies (hagiographies), study of modern religious traditions in context, and interpretations of sainthood in both theological and cross-cultural perspectives.
REL250
Spirituality and Creative Expression (3.0)
This course focuses on exploring spirituality and its manifestation in our lives through creative expression. The foundation for this exploration is maitri practice, which cultivates awareness of our own energetic makeup and how these energies manifest as the core patterns of our daily lives. Developed by Trungpa Rinpoche, the founder of Naropa, this practice is done in five different colored rooms, representing the Five Buddha Families. In addition to the maitri room practice, we work with several contemplative art forms, such as object arrangement, painting, brushstroke, and space awareness exercises. The challenge for each of us is to discover, integrate, and appreciate our energetic expressions, and to bring our creativity to form, individually and as a group. Prerequisite: REL160 or COR130.

REL255W
Opening the Heart: Meditation Weekend (1.0)
This course introduces spiritual practices, meditation, and various themes from specific spiritual traditions. The spiritual tradition will vary depending on the visiting instructor presenting. When the vast network of pain and confusion in the world is experienced, one can become overwhelmed and full of despair. This weekend provides tools that allow one to work with this in order to discover compassion and the courageous heart available to everyone. Cross-listed as REL554W.

REL258
Contemplative Practice Intensive (1.5-6.0)
The purpose of this intensive is to give students the opportunity to deepen their discipline and knowledge of their own spiritual tradition in a community setting that offers a prescribed schedule of practice and of service. Undergraduate students may choose to complete a program ranging in length from one week to a maximum of four weeks at a retreat center of their choice. The center or organization must be approved by the Religious Studies program. Some examples of these sites are Tibetan Buddhist meditation centers, Shambhala retreat centers, Zen centers, Christian monasteries, ashrams, and Jewish contemplative retreats. Others choices are possible with the approval of the program. It is advisable to check with the Contemplative Practice Coordinator to make sure that your choice of retreat center can be approved. Students are responsible for paying all program costs charged by the organization or institution that offers the retreat. These costs are in addition to Naropa tuition. This course is offered for variable credit; the number of credits (1.5 - 6) will be determined by the length of the retreat. Cross-listed as REL547.

REL271
Christian Prayer and Mystical Practices (3.0)
This course introduces Christian practices of prayer, with particular focus on contemplative and mystical spiritual practices within Christian traditions. The course explores lectio divina, Centering Prayer, Christian meditation, hesychast Jesus prayer, embodied labyrinth walking, praying with icons, liturgical prayers, and chanting. The course places these practices in broader historical and theological contexts of diverse Christian communities. The course includes instruction and active student participation in these practices. Cross-listed as REL571.

REL274
Tibetan I (4.0)
This class develops a foundation in literary Tibetan and begins the study of modern spoken Tibetan. The first semester focuses on the grammatical foundation of the language, the acquisition of basic vocabulary, and training in the skills of correct pronunciation, handwriting, and spelling. Students should expect to study at least eight hours per week outside of class. Cross-listed as REL503.

REL277
Sanskrit I (4.0)
An introduction to the classical Sanskrit language. The first-year course includes developing familiarization with the Sanskrit alphabet (devanagari), mastering the conventions of euphonic combination (sandhi), and learning the basics of Sanskrit grammar. In addition, we begin reading texts from the classical Indian tradition, particularly selections from the Mahabharata and Ramayana, and from some simple Buddhist texts (e.g., the Heart Sutra). Students should expect to study at least six hours per week outside of class. Cross-listed as REL507.

REL284
Tibetan II (4.0)
A continuation of Tibetan I. The second semester continues the work begun in Tibetan I, with the addition of working on an actual Tibetan text. Students use an integrated approach of developing varied oral, aural, and written skills to produce an overall knowledge of the language. Prerequisite: REL274. Cross-listed as REL533.

REL287
Sanskrit II (4.0)
This course is a continuation of Sanskrit I. Prerequisite: REL277. Cross-listed as REL537.

REL312
Spiritual Models of Social Action (3.0)
A study of historical and contemporary figures who exemplify the spiritual ideals of nonviolent social action, tracing their unique ways of turning their personal challenges into nonviolent leadership. Drawing upon autobiography, biography, critical analysis, and film as source material, students develop a personal dialog with each of these activists, examining how inner and outer journeys join in spiritually based social activism. Cross-listed as REL585. Co-requisite or prerequisite: COR113 or COR130.

REL314
Contemplative Islam: An Introduction to Its History, Thought, and Practice (3.0)
A historical-experiential introduction to Sufi history, beliefs, and practices in a five-day intensive retreat course. One part of the course will explore the historical development of a mystically
oriented movement in Islam, a movement which both understands itself to be older than Islam and which develops widely divergent attitudes to Islam. Its evolution will be pursued from Arabia to Central Asia and Egypt to modern Turkey, India, and the United States. The second part of the course will focus on the distinctive features of Sufi culture, mystical theology, subtle physiology and psychology, as well as training and practice. In this course, students will engage both historical and traditional texts, learn about traditional Sufi teaching and training contexts, and participate in experiential exercises in order to gain a firsthand experience of contemplative practices in Islamic culture.

REL321
Kabbalah and Consciousness (3.0)
This course explores the mystical teachings of the Kabbalah as a map of consciousness and path of spiritual transformation. Emphasis will be placed on contemporary, universal, and experiential approaches to these mystical teachings and practices. Cross-listed as REL 535.

REL323
Religious Experience in Africa: Sacred Cosmos, Ritual, and Community (3.0)
The course is an introduction to the cultural study of traditional African religions. We begin with close attention to cosmology, the traditional view of the world as filled with living, sacred powers. These powers are experienced in various ways: as ancestral presences; nature deities; personal guardian spirits. Therefore, we will focus on ritual practices, ways of communicating with unseen forces to bring communal and personal healing, restoring balance in the human relationship to nature. Corequisite or prerequisite: COR113 or COR130. Cross-listed as REL623.

REL325
Contemplative Christianity (3.0)
This course examines the contemplative and mystical tradition of Christianity and its recent recovery by mainstream Christians through the work of Thomas Merton and others. Students will examine contemplative perspectives on such major topics as God, Christ, salvation, divine union, deification, scripture, and spiritual evolution, especially as these views contrast with modern fundamentalism. This class will also study the contributions of the major historical writers of the tradition. The class includes ample time for contemplative practice. Offered alternate years. Co-requisite or prerequisite: COR113 or COR130. Cross-listed as REL525.

REL334
Hindu Tantra (3.0)
What is referred to as “Tantra” encompasses a complex set of traditions, practices, and worldviews that have been subjected to a rather extreme degree of misunderstanding, romanticization, cultural appropriation, as well as vilification. This course aims to demystify “Tantra” and create a solid foundation for understanding, appreciating, and historically navigating its many streams, social dynamics, ritual technologies, and philosophies. The timeline of our inquiry spans from Hindu Tantra’s first beginnings in fifth-century India all the way up to its dramatic metamorphosis in twentieth and twenty-first-century traditions dubbed “Neo-Tantra.”

REL338
Sufism: An Introduction to its History, Thought, and Practice (3.0)
A historical-experiential introduction to Sufi history, beliefs, and practices in a five-day intensive retreat course. One part of the course will explore the historical development of a mystically oriented movement in Islam, a movement which both understands itself to be older than Islam and which develops widely divergent attitudes to Islam. Its evolution will be pursued from Arabia to Central Asia and Egypt to modern Turkey, India, and the United States. The second part of the course will focus on the distinctive features of Sufi culture, mystical theology, subtle physiology, and psychology, as well as training and practice. In this course, students will engage both historical and traditional texts, learn about traditional Sufi teaching and training contexts, and participate in experiential exercises in order to gain a firsthand experience of Sufi meditation and other contemplative techniques.

REL345
Zen Buddhism (3.0)
In this course, the Zen Buddhist tradition is studied through its meditation practices and through lectures and discussion on the writings and teachings of the Zen masters. The course includes instruction in zazen, periods of sitting zazen, instructions on applying mindfulness to one’s daily life, as well as studying classic texts and teachings of the tradition. The course includes opportunities for a weekend retreat at one of the Zen centers in the Boulder vicinity. Corequisite or prerequisite: COR113 or COR130. Cross-listed as REL540.

REL346
Wisdom and Compassion: The Buddhist Path (3.0)
Compassion training is at the vanguard of the contemplative education movement nationally, and this course investigates compassion from personal, societal, and historical perspectives. What is compassion, and how can we become more compassionate? What contributions have the major religions of the world made to cultivating compassion? What has recent scientific research revealed about the cultivation of compassion? What contemplative practices and what activities deepen our empathy and compassion, and what are the results? These interdisciplinary studies are threaded by ongoing compassion meditation training, drawing especially from the Buddhist practices of loving-kindness and compassion. Co-requisite or prerequisite: COR113 or COR130.

REL348
Flight of the Swans: Dharma Comes West (3.0)
Buddhist thought, Buddhist practice, and Buddhist poetry have had a huge impact on North American culture since the 1950s. For several decades, the teachings of Buddhist adepts seemed inseparable from cultural revolution, from poetry, from free speech. Writers and artists popularized haiku, poems of enlightenment,
the anti-war movement, and the recognition that ecosystems are living beings. They wrote sutras and used magical language. Haiku flourished in WWII internment camps for Japanese-Americans. Much of this counter culture and tangled history arrived at Naropa University at its founding. This course will delve into the Beats, Dharma burns, ghost tantras, and the empowerment of women. The role of Asian American communities, converts, mountains, and rivers are part of the mix. Co-requisite or prerequisite: COR113 or COR130. Cross-listed as REL546.

REL349
Tibetan Buddhism: Inside the Mystique (3.0)
This course introduces Buddhism as it flowered in the Tibetan cultural region, with emphasis on the traditional cosmology of Tibet, its religious history, its exoteric teachings and practices [Hinayana and Mahayana], and its esoteric teachings and practices (Vajrayana). Special attention will be paid to the meditative traditions of Tibet and the Tibetan Book of the Dead. Co-requisite or prerequisite: COR113 or COR130.

REL351
Theories of Alternative Spiritualities and New Religious Movements (3.0)
This course provides theoretical frameworks for deepening student knowledge and understanding of alternative spiritual approaches through various lenses, including the insider/outsider problem, sociological and anthropological approaches to religion. Materials covered may include history of American spirituality, entheogens and shamanism, cults and sects, Neopaganism and various movements that arise in popular culture and practice. Special emphasis is placed on written and oral expression, integrative understanding, and the relationship between religious traditions and the personal spiritual understanding/journey. The goal of this course is to give students the necessary tools to produce academically rigorous research projects in any area of the field.

REL355
Introductory Sanskrit: The Language of the Gods (3.0)
Introductory Sanskrit offers preludes to further in-depth linguistic study and a preparatory training for aspiring Yoga teachers by providing the requisite resources and instruction for students to master the script, pronunciation, essential vocabulary, and rudimentary grammar of Sanskrit. To enliven our study of these foundational components of the “language of the gods,” anecdotal jewels from the great treasury of Sanskrit knowledge systems will be threaded through each element of the curriculum. These will include penetrating insights from the vast archive of yogic traditions, samples of the imaginative power and stunning beauty of Sanskrit literature, wise counsel and “good sayings” (subhasita) to live by, and an introduction to the practice of textual recitation.

REL375
Tibetan III (4.0)
This course continues to expand student knowledge of the grammar and vocabulary of literary Tibetan, primarily through translating texts in different genres such as sutras, lives of Buddhist saints, history, philosophy, and so forth. It also continues to develop student knowledge of spoken Tibetan. Prerequisite: REL284. Cross-listed as REL553.

REL376
Inner Oral Tradition of the Torah (3.0)
An examination of the mystical contemplative tradition of Judaism through a demonstration of its approach to Torah texts. The emphasis in the course is on the development and expression of critical thinking and intuition. Good questions are a priority over good answers. Age-old Chassidic methodologies will be used toward this end. Dramatization of stories will be utilized to access the students' emotions and intuitive powers. Exposure to practices like shofar and succah will give the students a firsthand experience of Jewish contemplative practice. Offered alternate years. Cross-listed as REL676. Co-requisite or prerequisite: COR113 or COR130.

REL377
Sanskrit III (4.0)
A continuation of the second year of basic Sanskrit grammar, pronunciation, dictionary usage, and vocabulary acquisition. There is strong emphasis on noun compounds (samaasas). We move onward through the Goldman and Goldman primer, Devavanipravesika. We read selectively in a range of texts, including Hindu and Buddhist scripture, and sectarian court poetry. Stanzas from Bhagavad Gita are introduced, as well as the Heart Sutra. Particular attention is given in class to Indic culture, its connection to Sanskrit language and religious traditions, and issues raised by the work of translation. Prerequisite: REL287. Cross-listed as REL557.

REL385
Tibetan IV (4.0)
This course continues to expand student knowledge of the grammar and vocabulary of literary Tibetan, primarily through translating texts in different genres such as sutras, lives of Buddhist saints, history, philosophy, and so forth. It also continues to develop student knowledge of spoken Tibetan. Prerequisite: REL375. Cross-listed as REL583.

REL387
Sanskrit IV (4.0)
In this semester, we complete the range of Sanskrit grammar, with secondary conjugations, vocabulary acquisition, an investigation of etymology, and a study of the principles behind words and their meanings. In addition to finishing the textbook on grammar, the Devavanipravesika, the class reads examples of a range of Buddhist, Hindu, and secular verses. Increased attention is given to translation and the hands-on practice of bringing ancient texts into the contemporary world. Prerequisite: REL377. Cross-listed as REL587.

REL390W
Shambhala Training Level I: The Art of Being Human (1.0)
Shambhala Training is the path of study and practice of Shambhala warriorship: the tradition of human bravery, not being afraid of
who you are. This path shows how to take the challenges of daily life in our modern society as opportunities for contemplative practice. Shambhala Training is inspired by the ancient legend of the Kingdom of Shambhala, said to be an enlightened society based on gentle and fearless action. The Shambhala Training path of study and practice begins with a series of weekend levels known as the Heart of Warriorship, which provides the tools you need to establish a personal discipline of meditation practice and to discover the basic principles of warriorship in your daily life.

REL391W
Shambhala Training Level II: Birth of the Warrior (1.0)
Shambhala Training is the path of study and practice of Shambhala warriorship: the tradition of human bravery, not being afraid of who you are. This path shows how to take the challenges of daily life in our modern society as opportunities for contemplative practice. Shambhala Training is inspired by the ancient legend of the Kingdom of Shambhala, said to be an enlightened society based on gentle and fearless action. The Shambhala Training path of study and practice begins with a series of weekend levels known as the Heart of Warriorship, which provides the tools you need to establish a personal discipline of meditation practice and to discover the basic principles of warriorship in your daily life.

REL392W
Shambhala Training Level III: Warrior in the World (1.0)
Shambhala Training is the path of study and practice of Shambhala warriorship: the tradition of human bravery, not being afraid of who you are. This path shows how to take the challenges of daily life in our modern society as opportunities for contemplative practice. Shambhala Training is inspired by the ancient legend of the Kingdom of Shambhala, said to be an enlightened society based on gentle and fearless action. The Shambhala Training path of study and practice begins with a series of weekend levels known as the Heart of Warriorship, which provides the tools you need to establish a personal discipline of meditation practice and to discover the basic principles of warriorship in your daily life.

REL393W
Shambhala Training Level IV: Awakened Heart (1.0)
Shambhala Training is the path of study and practice of Shambhala warriorship: the tradition of human bravery, not being afraid of who you are. This path shows how to take the challenges of daily life in our modern society as opportunities for contemplative practice. Shambhala Training is inspired by the ancient legend of the Kingdom of Shambhala, said to be an enlightened society based on gentle and fearless action. The Shambhala Training path of study and practice begins with a series of weekend levels known as the Heart of Warriorship, which provides the tools you need to establish a personal discipline of meditation practice and to discover the basic principles of warriorship in your daily life.

REL394W
Shambhala Training Level V: Open Sky (1.0)
Shambhala Training is the path of study and practice of Shambhala warriorship: the tradition of human bravery, not being afraid of