

Study of Religion

Recognizing that Religious Studies is not formally represented in Berkeley's curriculum, the Designated Emphasis in the Study of Religion (DESR) was established to provide multidisciplinary training in histories and methods of the study of religion, as well as in critical perspectives on both. DESR is administered by the Graduate Group in the Study of Religion through the Center for Interdisciplinary Critical Inquiry, in partnership with the Berkeley Center for the Study of Religion.

Applicants to the DESR must fill out the online application and submit a statement of intent (500-1000 words) describing how religion relates to the applicant's dissertation project or research interests. A recommendation form from a faculty member preferably in the applicant's home department (potentially an adviser) should also be sent under separate cover.

For more information see <https://bcsr.berkeley.edu/academics/>

Only students enrolled in Ph.D. programs at the University of California, Berkeley are eligible to apply for the DESR. Students are required to fulfill the requirements of the DE before taking the Qualifying Examination. To qualify for the Designated Emphasis, the student must have on the Qualifying Examination committee a representative of the DESR; and one of the members of the student's dissertation committee must represent the DESR and be a member of the DE's designated faculty. These faculty members may be outside or inside members of the student's committees.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

DESR students are required to take three courses. Two of these courses (STRELIG 200, 201) comprise the core curriculum, and one is an elective (STRELIG 203) selected from a list of courses offered by the DESR faculty.

STRELIG 200. Methods in the Study of Religion

Methods in the Study of Religion is an introduction to methodological best practices in the Study of Religion from the perspectives of different fields. It is made up of multiple modules that combine the study of primary sources with exemplary methodological approaches. These approaches include but are not limited to: anthropological theories of religion and society, historical genealogies of categories of religion and the secular, theology and Church history, sociological approaches to issues like religious organization and conflict, religion and science, religious literature and Biblical hermeneutics, as well as particular religious histories.

STRELIG 201. Histories of the Study of Religion

Histories of the Study of Religion is an introduction to the history and development of the field of "Religious Studies" as an intellectual space for the study of a sometimes historicized, sometimes naturalized phenomenon called "religion." Since the narration of any history of the study of religion serves to circumscribing a particular set of phenomena as "religious," this course does not isolate a canonical history of the field. Instead, it progresses in roughly diachronic manner, through a number of thematic threads representing the development of different domains of the study of religion.

STRELIG 203. Study of Religion Elective

Additionally, students must complete one elective course from a list of pre-approved graduate courses on religion. In some instances, students may petition for other, relevant courses to be counted towards their elective requirement. If a course is offered for variable units, students must enroll at the maximum possible unit value. Potential elective courses will vary depending on faculty teaching plans in a given semester.

The DESR was designed to both to provide an introduction to the field of Religious Studies, and to preserve a uniquely de-centered Berkeley approach to the study of Religion.

Degree Designation

Upon successful completion of the dissertation, the student's transcript will include the designation: "Ph.D. in [major] with a Designated Emphasis in the Study of Religion." This designation certifies that they have participated in, and successfully completed, a Designated Emphasis in the Study of Religion in addition to all departmental requirements for the doctorate.

STRELIG 200 Methods in the Study of Religion 4 Units

Terms offered: Prior to 2007

STRELIG 200 is an introduction to methodological best practices in the Study of Religion from the perspectives of different fields. It is made up of multiple modules that combine the study of primary sources with exemplary methodological approaches. These approaches include but are not limited to: anthropological theories of religion and society, historical genealogies of categories of religion and the secular, theology and Church history, sociological approaches to issues like religious organization and conflict, religion and science, religious literature and Biblical hermeneutics, as well as particular religious histories.

Hours & Format

Fall and/or spring:

15 weeks - 3-4 hours of lecture per week

15 weeks - 3-4 hours of lecture per week

Additional Details

Subject/Course Level: Study of Religion/Graduate

Grading: Letter grade.

STRELIG 201 Histories of the Study of Religion 4 Units

Terms offered: Fall 2025, Fall 2024, Fall 2023

STRELIG201 is an introduction to the history and development of the field of "Religious Studies" as an intellectual space for the study of a sometimes historicized, sometimes naturalized phenomenon called "religion." Since the narration of any history of the study of religion serves to circumscribing a particular set of phenomena as "religious," this course does not isolate a canonical history of the field. Instead, it progresses in roughly diachronic manner, through a number of thematic threads representing the development of different domains of the study of religion.

Hours & Format

Fall and/or spring:

15 weeks - 1-2 hours of lecture and 2-1 hours of discussion per week

15 weeks - 1-2 hours of lecture and 2-1 hours of discussion per week

Additional Details

Subject/Course Level: Study of Religion/Graduate

Grading: Letter grade.

STRELIG 202 Local Approaches to the Study of Religion 2 - 4 Units

Terms offered: Prior to 2007

STRELIG202 is a required course in the Designated Emphasis in the Study of Religion, intended to create a space for students to reflect on the issues involved in the application of critical and theoretical approaches. Looking closely at a case study of the application of both of these kinds of approaches to a particular subfield prepares the student for the methodological challenges of applying the term "religion" in their own field. STRELIG202 asks students to consider the opportunities and benefits of two approaches to the beliefs and practices connected with a particular set of traditions: first, as studied in their historical and cultural specificity, versus second, as described as the instantiation of a universal religious phenomenon.

Rules & Requirements

Prerequisites: It is recommended, but not required, that students take STRELIG 200 and STRELIG 201 prior to STRELIG 202

Hours & Format

Fall and/or spring:

15 weeks - 1-2 hours of lecture and 2-1 hours of discussion per week

15 weeks - 1-2 hours of lecture and 2-1 hours of discussion per week

Additional Details

Subject/Course Level: Study of Religion/Graduate

Grading: Letter grade.

STRELIG 203 Study of Religion Elective 4 Units

Terms offered: Prior to 2007

Study of Religion electives are taught by core and affiliated faculty in the Graduate Group in the Study of Religion and Berkeley Center for the Study of Religion and offer important treatments of materials significant to the program's course of study in the history, development, methods, and theories of the study of religion. In a typical DESR elective, materials are presented through anthropological, historical, philosophical, political, rhetorical, sociological, or other disciplinary lens that constitutes the course's primary materials for study and inquiry. Students in the Designated Emphasis in the Study of Religion are required to complete one elective from a wide selection of cross-listed courses offered each year.

Hours & Format

Fall and/or spring:

15 weeks - 1-2 hours of seminar and 2-1 hours of discussion per week

15 weeks - 2-1 hours of seminar and 1-2 hours of discussion per week

Additional Details

Subject/Course Level: Study of Religion/Graduate

Grading: Letter grade.