

THE COMPARATIVE STUDY OF RELIGION IN HARVARD COLLEGE  
Handbook for Concentrators



COMMITTEE ON THE STUDY OF RELIGION  
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## AN EXCEPTIONAL INTERDISCIPLINARY CONCENTRATION IN HARVARD COLLEGE

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In the Comparative Study of Religion, students explore the most profound issues that face human beings. These include the meaning of community, differing conceptions of the human and the divine, global politics and history, and the multiplicity of understandings of life, suffering and death. Our program is unique in allowing students to ponder relevant and profound questions in a rigorous, critical, multi-disciplinary context. Students refine their interests and craft individual plans of study in conversation with dedicated faculty advisers. A superb Tutorial sequence is at the heart of the concentration, both in its high academic quality, and in generating a close group of concentrators. Religion 97, the Sophomore Tutorial, introduces students to religious phenomena and the tools scholars use to interpret them. Religion 98, the Junior Tutorial, offers students the opportunity to pursue topics of particular interest individually or in small groups, and to focus on close reading and writing skills. Religion 99ab, the Senior Seminar, guides students who elect to write a thesis through the process. Those pursuing a thesis have an advising team that includes a faculty adviser, an advanced graduate-student adviser, and the Assistant Director of Undergraduate Studies. Seniors not writing a thesis can choose to “cap” the concentration experience through independent research which can take the form of an additional term of Religion 98r, or enrollment in Religion 91r.

## IN A COMMUNITY OF OUTSTANDING STUDENTS AND WORLD CLASS FACULTY

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The concentration welcomes about 10 sophomores each year. In the tutorials, students get to know one another well, fostering a strong, engaged, and genuine intellectual community within the larger university. Students regularly interact with faculty members and graduate students at weekly teas, lectures, and other events. Student satisfaction ratings of our tutorials and academic advising is consistently extremely high, ranking among the best in the College. Students design a concentration plan in conversation with the Director of Undergraduate Studies. The initial sketch is not set in stone, as students revise their plans each term as additional course work enables further refinement of their interests. A student’s choice of Tradition, Geographical Area and/or Approach anchors their requirements.

## CONNECTED WITH ALUMNI WORKING WITH DISTINCTION IN A RANGE OF JOBS

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Our alumni work in a wide range of industries including business, finance, education, politics, entertainment, creative and performative art, foreign intelligence, public service, law, ministry and medicine. They pursue advanced studies in a variety of humanistic and social scientific fields, as well as in music, art, creative writing and the dramatic arts. Please browse our website for more about what alumni go on to do after College, and for a list of Senior Thesis topics in the Study of Religion.

## STEPS TO A CONCENTRATION PLAN IN THE COMPARATIVE STUDY OF RELIGION

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### 1: SELECT A TRADITION AND/OR A GEOGRAPHICAL AREA

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- ☐ *Ancient Near Eastern/Israelite*
- ☐ *African & Afro-Atlantic*
- ☐ *Greek/Hellenistic/Roman*
- ☐ *Hindu*

- ☐ *Buddhist*
- ☐ *Christian*
- ☐ *East Asian*
- ☐ *Islamic*
- ☐ *Judaic*
- ☐ *South Asian*
- ☐ *Modern West & Religions of the Americas*

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## 2: CONSIDER INCORPORATING A PARTICULAR APPROACH (OPTIONAL)

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- ☐ *Philosophy of Religion*
- ☐ *Religion & Social Science*
- ☐ *Religion, Race & Gender*
- ☐ *Religion, Literature & the Arts*
- ☐ *Religion & Science*

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## 3: CHOOSE FROM THE FOLLOWING CONCENTRATION OPTIONS

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- ☐ *Full Concentration: Option A or B*

Basic Requirements: 1 Comparative Course, Sophomore Tutorial (Rel 97), Junior Tutorial (Rel 98), Thesis Seminar (Rel 99, optional), 8 or 9 courses as approved by the D. U. S.

- ☐ *Joint Concentration: Option C or D*

Basic Requirements: 1 Comparative Course, Sophomore Tutorial (Rel 97), Junior Tutorial (Rel 98), Thesis Seminar (Rel 99, optional), 4 or 5 courses as approved by the D. U. S.

- ☐ *Religion as a Secondary Field*

Requirements: 1 Comparative Course, 5 courses approved by the D. U. S.

Please see the Forms at the end of this *Handbook* and make an appointment with the D. U. S. to discuss your interests in detail.

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## LANGUAGE STUDY

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The concentration expects that students will study languages necessary to their specialization. Students who elect to write a Senior Honors Thesis should integrate the use of relevant languages into their analysis (e.g., if a student is writing about Qur'anic interpretation, knowledge of Arabic is expected). An important consideration in the evaluation of a senior thesis is whether students demonstrate an awareness of primary sources in their original language. Students may count up to two language courses towards concentration credit beginning with the second year (third term) of study. The required texts in the course must be either relevant to the study of a religious tradition. Note that not all second-year language courses fit these criteria.

## STUDY ABROAD

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Many of our concentrators choose to study abroad. Concentration credit for study abroad is possible with advanced consultation with the Director of Undergraduate Studies. Tutorials cannot be taken out of residence. After visiting Harvard's Office for International Education ([oie.fas.harvard.edu](http://oie.fas.harvard.edu)) make an appointment to discuss your plans with the D.U.S.

## THE SENIOR HONORS THESIS

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Students who wish to pursue Latin Honors must write a Senior Honors Thesis, participate in the Senior Tutorial (Religion 99ab), and must have maintained a minimum average GPA in the concentration of B+ (3.33) by the end of the first semester of the junior year. Thesis writers are expected to have developed, with the guidance of their advisers, the necessary competencies for their studies, which may include language skills, fieldwork preparation, and archival practice. Students who plan to pursue a thesis using ethnographic or anthropological approaches are required to complete at least one course introducing these methods by the end of the junior year. Consult the D.U.S for approved courses. Students pursuing research using human subjects must also apply to Harvard's Committee on the Use of Human Subjects for project approval. Visit their website at <http://cuhs.harvard.edu> for application forms and more information. The Assistant Director of Undergraduate Studies has hard copies of past theses. Reading through these projects can stimulate ideas for a topic or prompt new thinking about how to organize the thesis.

Creative Thesis: A creative thesis is an option for some thesis writers. This is a thesis that includes a work of fiction, drama, film, music or other artistic medium, and must be approved by the A. B. Subcommittee before the start of the second term of the junior year. All creative theses must include an written, analytical component. In their petition, students articulate why they are interested in a creative thesis, and how this pursuit will allow them to accomplish a project that could not be accomplished by writing a conventional thesis. In many cases, the student will need a separate adviser for the creative component of the thesis. College-level course work in the genre of the creative project is required. If the project involves a performance or exhibition of any kind, the student is responsible for ensuring that it is professionally recorded for the purpose of formal evaluation. Any funding for supplies, publicity, and the like is the responsibility of the student. The creative component and the analytical component of the thesis will be assigned separate Latin grades, counted equally; if different, these two grades will be averaged into a single grade for the entire project.

Funding for Thesis Research: In preparing for senior thesis work, concentrators often choose to conduct research in the summer. Harvard has a number of institutes and centers that provide summer research grants for undergraduate fieldwork and research. Depending upon the project, a student may apply for grants from, among others, the Center for the Study of World Religions, the Ambassador Loeb Fund, the Center for African Studies, the Center for Middle Eastern Studies, the Edwin O. Reischauer Institute of Japanese Studies, the Henry Rosovsky Undergraduate Research Fund, the David Rockefeller Center for Latin American and Iberian Studies, the Center for International Affairs, and the Josephine Murray Traveling Fellowship Program of Radcliffe College, and the Ethnicity, Migration and Rights Thesis Grants. For more information students should consult with their advisers and with the Harvard College Funding Sources database at <http://funding.fas.harvard.edu>.

**Thesis Oral Exam:** An oral exam is required of all thesis writers. Thesis readers provide written comments to thesis writers in advance of the oral, to help students to prepare. Oral exams are usually 1½ hours long and occur during late April or early May. See the Senior Honors Thesis Handbook for more information.

**Prizes:** Study of Religion Senior Thesis Prize: a monetary prize given out for a thesis of highest distinction. Thomas T. Hoopes Prize: open to all undergraduates with outstanding scholarly work on any topic. Consult <http://prizes.fas.harvard.edu> for more information on College prizes.

## MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE ON THE STUDY OF RELIGION

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**Catherine Brekus**, Chair, Charles Warren Professor of the History of Religion in America  
**David Holland**, Professor of North American Religious History (Director of Graduate Studies)  
**Courtney Bickel Lamberth**, Lecturer on the Study of Religion (Director of Undergraduate Studies)  
**Ali S. Asani**, Professor of Indo-Muslim & Islamic Religion and Cultures (on leave Spring 2020)  
**Giovanni Bazzana**, Professor of New Testament  
**David Carrasco**, Neil L. Rudenstine Professor of the Study of Latin America  
**Francis X. Clooney**, S. J., Parkman Professor of Divinity  
**Shaye J.D. Cohen**, Nathan Littauer Professor of Hebrew Literature & Philosophy  
**Diana L. Eck**, Fredric Wertham Professor of Law & Psychiatry in Society (on leave 2019)  
**James Engell**, Gurney Professor of English & Professor of Comparative Literature  
**Francis Schüssler Fiorenza**, Charles Chauncey Stillman Professor of Roman Catholic Theological Studies (on leave Spring 2020)  
**Luis M. Girón Negrón**, Professor of Romance Languages & Literatures, and Professor of Comparative Literature  
**Janet Gyatso**, Hershey Professor of Buddhist Studies (on leave 2019)  
**Helen Hardacre**, Reischauer Institute Professor of Japanese Religions & Society  
**David Hempton**, John Lord O'Brian Professor of Divinity & Alonzo L. McDonald Family Professor of Evangelical Theological Studies  
**Amy Hollywood**, Elizabeth H. Monrad Professor of Christian Studies  
**Racha Kirakosian**, Associate Professor of Germanic Languages & Literatures and of the Study of Religion (on leave 2019-20)  
**Leonard W. J. van der Kuijp**, Professor of Tibetan & Himalayan Studies  
**David C. Lamberth**, Professor of Philosophy & Theology  
**Jacob Olupona**, Professor of African & African American Religious Traditions  
**Parimal G. Patil**, Professor of Religion & Indian Philosophy  
**Kimberley C. Patton**, Professor of the Comparative & Historical Study of Religion  
**Matthew L. Potts**, Associate Professor of Religion & Literature & of Ministry  
**Michael Puett**, Walter C. Klein Professor of Chinese History (on leave 2019)  
**Mayra Rivera Rivera**, Professor of Religion & Latinx Studies, and Professor of Romance Languages & Literatures  
**Michelle C. Sanchez**, Assistant Professor of Theology  
**Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza**, Krister Stendahl Professor of Divinity  
**Charles M. Stang**, Professor of Early Christian Thought  
**D. Andrew Teeter**, Professor of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament  
**Malika Zeghal**, Prince Alwaleed Bin Talal Professor in Contemporary Islamic Thought & Life

## ADMINISTRATIVE STAFF

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**Elise Ciregna**, PhD, is the Program Director for the Study of Religion and  
**Kathryn Webber**, PhD, is the Program's Administrative Assistant.

The main offices for the Study of Religion are on the third floor of the Barker Center, 12 Quincy Street, Cambridge. To reach the office by telephone, please call 617-495-5781. Our fax number is 617-496-5798, and our email address is [csrel@fas.harvard.edu](mailto:csrel@fas.harvard.edu).