

Religious Studies

Spring 2014 - Course Descriptions

saintmarys.edu/departments/religious-studies

First Course in Religious Studies

Reminder: RLST 101 is a pre-requisite for all 200-level RLST courses, including those taken abroad.

RLST 101.01, 02
3.0 credits

Introducing Religious Studies –
Encounters with the Divine in Ancient Mediterranean Religions
9:30-10:45 TR
11:00-12:15 TR

John Fotopoulos

This course will broaden students' understanding of the nature and complexities of religion and allow them to gain an understanding how religion interacts with other aspects of culture by examining the worldviews, beliefs, practices, symbols, and social formations of Greco-Roman religions, Second Temple Judaism, and Pauline Christianity. The course is divided into three sections devoted to each of these three religious traditions. As this occurs, students will explore each religion's capacity to provide meaning to life, while considering their potential to challenge and transform individuals and societies. Topics such as God/gods, myth, cosmology, evil, sickness, suffering, death, afterlife, ethics, ritual, love, mysticism/prayer, and community will be addressed. The study of these religious ideas and expressions will be done by reading ancient writings and contemporary secondary texts. Early Christianity will be encountered through the mission and writings of Paul the Apostle. While studying Greco-Roman religions, Second Temple Judaism, and Pauline Christianity and the cultural norms within which these three religions thrived, the course will also highlight similar and/or divergent religious ideas from contemporary American popular culture to show similarities and differences from contemporary cultural practices and beliefs. Students will consider how these ancient religions' search for meaning, particularly Christianity's, is still relevant to humanity's search for meaning today. The ancient world in which these three religions thrived, much like ours today, was a world full of dramatic changes, rapid development, increased urbanization, potential prosperity, and potential danger. Thus, students will gain an understanding of how these three ancient religions helped people to cope with all of the challenges of ancient life and to feel at home in the cosmos.

RLST 101.03, 04
3.0 credits

Introducing Religious Studies –
The Plurality of Perspectives on Religion
11:00-11:50 MWF
12:00-12:50 MWF

Terence Martin

What is religion? Why are there so many perspectives on the sacred both within and between religious traditions? And how is a thoughtful person to evaluate the overlapping and competing claims? Taking a dialogue by Cicero as our model, we will explore the central question of religious life – the nature of God(s), the condition of human life and what is expected of human beings – from as many different angles as possible. Through a highly diverse set of materials – from a Sufi mystic and a Christian ironist to an American deist and a religious activist—we will reflect on how to deal with the various and

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sometimes contradictory plurality of religious viewpoints. Our task will be to think carefully about the plurality of religious perspectives; and in that context, to reflect on our own religious questions and traditions.

RLST 101.05
3.0 credits

Introducing Religious Studies –
Religious Issues in Contemporary Society: God, Self and Other
3:00-4:15 MW

Kurt Buhring

What does it mean to be a religious person in modern society? How does one's religious identity impact the way in which one understands the world? What are religious responses to perennial questions of faith and doubt, love and suffering, and social justice and oppression in light of the contemporary cultural context? How do religious persons deal with practical issues such as religious pluralism, politics, and scientific developments? What is the status of women in religion? We will examine these questions and others in the pursuit of a greater understanding of the study of religion.

In the first few weeks of the course, we will explore the intersections of religion and science, examining ways in which religious views may be impacted by scientific claims. In the next part of the class we will encounter several ways in which religious identities and concepts are related to historical and personal experiences, especially experiences of suffering and evil. Then, through the lens of a contemporary novel, we will consider the relationship among religion, culture, and identity, paying particular attention to diversity within Islam. In the last portion of the course, we will consider ways in which to relate to those who are different religiously from us, the religious diversity of the United States, and what possible role(s) religion fills in the US. These interdisciplinary intersections will provide the context for reflection, discussion, and written expression. One of the main goals of the course is to provide an opportunity for students to explore the unique perspective of religious studies and to suggest the continuing relevance of this standpoint. This course fulfills the first general education Religious Studies requirement.

RLST 101.06, 08
3.0 credits

Introducing Religious Studies –
Ideas and Experiences
3:30-4:45 TR
2:00-3:15 TR

Molly Gower

This course introduces students to the study of religion and theological inquiry. Through a variety of sources it explores the meaning of religion in personal and cultural life. In this course, we attend to notions of God, the human person, relationships and community, and the good life and ethics in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. We consider how these three religious traditions respond to questions such as: Who am I? Whose am I? Who is God? How ought we to live? From there, we turn to the relationship between ideas and experiences. We attend to plurality and change. In the end, we focus on the experiences of women in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.

RLST 101W.07
4.0 credits

Introducing Religious Studies – *Conversion*
2:00-2:50 MWRF

Stacy Davis

This course is an introduction to the subject of conversion. It will focus on the following questions: Why does an individual leave one set of beliefs for another? How does this take place? What are the practical consequences for the new believer? How does a conversion change the convert's relationship to the world around him or her? With these questions in mind, we will begin by reading texts that define conversion in academic terms and then will apply those terms to fictional and non-fictional case studies, specifically the autobiography of Faith Adiele, the literature of David Palahniuk and Margaret Atwood, and the biography of Malcolm X.

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RLST 101 fulfills the Religious Traditions 1 requirement in the general education curriculum.

One of the first things you will learn about religious conversion is that “conversion is a process” (Rambo 5). Writing is also a process. Because this is a W course, you will spend a significant amount of time not only writing papers but also revising papers. A well-written and well-argued paper is rarely the result of a first draft, and you will have the opportunity to revise most of your papers for argument development and for grammar and style before I grade them. At the end of the semester, you will select papers for your Writing Proficiency portfolio and have the opportunity to fulfill your basic W requirement.

Second Course in Religious Studies

RLST 236.01,02
3.0 credits

Faith in Action
12:00-12:50 MWF
1:00-1:50 MWF

Kurt Buhring

This course examines the faith, practices and theories of influential modern activists and writers who exemplify a variety of approaches to the Christian quest for justice. Questions we will consider include: What is the theological basis for religious activism? How does this theological basis impact the practices of social justice activism? What is the role of violence in these practices? What particular concepts of justice are promoted by Christian activists, and why?

This course is designed to provide an opportunity for students to explore issues such as these by integrating in-class readings and discussions with out-of-classroom experiences. We will not only read about activists such as Dorothy Day, Mohandas Gandhi, Martin Luther King, Jr., and Thomas Merton, but we will also have the opportunity to apply class principles in a required 15-hour service learning project within the South Bend community. Throughout the course of the semester we will explore connections among the various thinkers we encounter in class and the “real world” we experience today. This course meets the requirement for a second general education religious studies class, Religious Traditions II. It also counts as the following Sophia requirements: LO3 Social Responsibility A and B, and Academic Experiential Learning.

RLST 251.01,02
3.0 credits

Christian Tradition
9:00-9:50 MWF
10:00-10:50 MWF

Terence Martin

Christianity – like any religion – is historical and pluralistic; that is, it changes and develops through time, and thereby, it includes within itself a host of different experiences and perspectives. This has always been the case, from the early Jewish-Christian communities to the present day. Each generation passes down what it takes to be the essential core of the Christian message in a way which it hopes will be faithful to its classic sources and credible to its own situation. We inherit both the wisdom and the illusions of each step and each voice along the way. In this course we will take a close look at a number of authors who have been instrumental in raising the critical questions necessary to allow the Christian tradition to respond creatively and responsibly to the challenges faced in different periods. The works of these authors deserve the title of Christian “classics”—meaning that while they spoke powerfully to readers of their own day, they also continue to make demands on later readers, challenging them to understand their lives new ways and transforming their vision of life’s meaning. Each author poses a different critical question about what it means to be religious and what it means to be human. In doing so, each provides a distinct portrait of what Christian existence is all about – the nature of ultimate reality,

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the place of human existence in the larger scheme of things, the kind of life people are called to live, the usefulness of religious institutions, and so on.

RLST 261.01, 02
3.0 credits

Catholic Faith and Life
11:00-12:15 TR
2:00-3:15 TR

Phyllis Kaminski

This course explores the faith and life of the living Catholic community and the basic beliefs, values, symbols and practices of those who call themselves Catholic. Catholicism, as its very name implies, has a universal outlook and is characterized by a radical openness to all truth. It is comprehensive and all-embracing of Christian experience, in all the theological, doctrinal, spiritual, liturgical, canonical, institutional, and social richness of diversity of that experience. Although we begin by focusing particularly on Catholicism in the United States, we go back to the origins of Christian faith. Who was Jesus of Nazareth? Why are his life, death, and resurrection at the heart of our faith? What is the meaning of Tradition? What was Vatican II? We will examine the legacy of this historic Council. The dynamic interplay of continuity and change in the church will serve to anchor our understanding of Catholic faith and life.

To learn how the Spirit works we will explore current perceptions of Roman Catholicism, its varied devotional practices, its organizational structure, and its major symbols. Who are American Catholics? What do they believe? What does the Church teach? What is the relationship of theology to practice? What is the primary sacrament of Catholic faith? Why are there others? What really matters? Given the complex relationship of faith to doctrine and life, how are we to understand mature conscience formation and to acquire the skills necessary for adult spiritual life? We will end by engaging the communal story of Catholic faith and life as it is expressed in the witness of committed believers in the late twentieth and the early 21st century.

Electives

RLST 308
3.0 credit

Paul and His Times
2:00-3:15 TR

John Fotopoulos

Who was Paul the Apostle? What can be known about him, his letters, and his beliefs? Paul has been perceived as a controversial figure by many people from the time of his conversion from Judaism to Christianity. For some, he has been considered a pseudo-apostle, an apostate, a chauvinist, or even a misogynist, while for others he has been considered the founder of Gentile Christianity, a brilliant theologian, an advocate for women and slaves, and a Christian saint. What can be made of this person who is so greatly despised and so greatly loved? This course will introduce students to the life, letters, and beliefs of Paul the Apostle. Emphasis will be given to: 1) Paul's biography as reconstructed from his letters and from a critical use of Acts; 2) the social and theological themes of Paul's letters through the respective cultural, religious, and political contexts of each writing; and 3) Paul's beliefs regarding a variety of controversial issues within their first century C.E. setting. Students will honestly and critically engage Paul's own writings and will become familiar with positions in Pauline scholarship by reading prominent authors in the field.

RLST 321
3.0 credits

The Mystics
3:00-4:15 MW

Molly Gower

This course explores the wisdom of the Christian mystics and the significance of this wisdom for theology and religious studies. We review the pursuit and experience of the direct presence of God in the

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Christian tradition. As we read texts written by and about the Christian mystics, we come to understand the terms that scholars have used to think about mysticism. From there, we turn to contemporary questions in the study of mysticism.

RLST 338 1.0 credit S/U	Studies in Theology and Film: Love and Courage 6:00-7:50 Mondays (7 consecutive 1/20-3/3)	Elena Malits, CSC
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This class meets seven times, beginning the second Monday of the semester. It is an ALL DISCUSSION course of DVDs or instant videos seen when students desire before the class. The films are "Roman Holiday," "To Kill a Mockingbird," "Freedom Writers," "A Man for All Seasons," "Dead Man Walking," and "Of Gods and Men." Requirements: view the film, study the emailed questions for it, attend all classes, participate in the discussions, write a four page paper at the end.

RLST 406.01 3.0 credits	Ways of Doing Theology 9:30-10:45 TR	Phyllis Kaminski
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All Christians are called upon to give an account of their faith. Theology is one public expression of that account. Every generation of believers hopes that the theologies which influence and shape their lives will be appropriate to the classics of the Christian tradition and credible to the age in which they speak and live. Doing theology, therefore, demands that we develop and use methods that stand at the crossroads of several worldviews as they clarify theological affirmations, make theology more adequate to contemporary problems, and bring forward the religious tradition in living and life-giving ways.

Our goal in this course will be a practical examination of various theological approaches. As "a Christian community of intellectual inquiry," we will explore together questions such as: how is theology done? by whom? for whom? how is theology for the Church? is Catholic theology unique? how do theologians use the Bible? what does it mean to be faithful to Tradition? what makes adequate theologies? how can we do the job of theology better? While geared toward Religious Studies majors and minors, the course can serve any student with solid general education background and interest. A seminar, this course requires active class participation, collaboration, discussion, three short papers, and a final paper. Satisfies Theory requirement for RLST majors.

RLST 497 1 to 3.0 credits	Independent Study	Staff
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Permission required

RLST 998 0 credits	Advanced Writing Proficiency	Kurt Buhring
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Permission required

RLST 999 0 credits	Comprehensive examination	Kurt Buhring
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Permission required