

# Religious studies & Theology

## Spring 2015 - Course Descriptions

[saintmarys.edu/departments/religious-studies](http://saintmarys.edu/departments/religious-studies)

---

### First Course in Religious Studies

***RLST 101 is a pre-requisite for all 200-level RLST courses, including those taken abroad.  
All RLST 101 courses fulfill Sophia LO1: Religious Traditions I***

**RLST 101.01**  
**3.0 credits**

**Introducing Religious Studies –  
*World Religions in Dialogue (Critical Thinking Seminar)*  
2:00-3:15 TR**

**Anita Houck**

How can learning about religion help us understand ourselves and others? This course will explore that question as we gain a sound basic understanding of Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, Islam, and the nature of religion. We'll take four main approaches. First, we'll use scholarly tools and critical-thinking skills that will help us understand religions, others, and ourselves better. Second, we'll learn some of the major concepts that make these religions distinctive, and perhaps make them similar as well. Third, we'll study different kinds of religious texts, from sacred scriptures to a contemporary documentary about rebirth in Tibetan Buddhism. Finally, we'll examine the diverse, changing ways these religions are lived today, practicing information-literacy skills that will help us evaluate the portrayal of religion in contemporary media. The course fulfills LO3: Intercultural Competence A and is pending approval LO2: Critical Thinking Seminar.

**RLST 101.02, 03**  
**3.0 credits**

**Introducing Religious Studies –  
*The Plurality of Perspectives on Religion*  
10:00-10:50 MWF  
9:00-9:50 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 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 101.04**  
**3.0 credits**

**Introducing Religious Studies –  
*Religious Issues in Contemporary Society: God, Self and Other*  
11:00-11:50 MWF**

**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. This course will ask participants to critically evaluate their notions of both the nature and the role of religion in today's world through an exploration of the works of

## ***RLST Spring 2015 Course Descriptions***

novelists, theologians, political philosophers, and scientists, among others.

**RLST 101.05, 06**  
**3.0 credits**

**Introducing Religious Studies – *Conversion***  
**11:00-12:15 TR**  
**12:30-1:45 TR**

**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 Sara Miles, the literature of Ngūgĩ wa Thiong'o, and the biography of Malcolm X.

**RLST 101.07**  
**3.0 credits**

**Introducing Religious Studies –**  
***Encounters with the Divine in Ancient Mediterranean Religions***  
**1:00-1:50 MWF**

**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 101W.08**  
**4.0 credits**

**Introducing Religious Studies –**  
***World Religions in Dialogue (Basic W course)***  
**12:30-1:45 TR**  
**also meets 3:00-3:50 W**

**Anita Houck**

How can learning about religion help us understand ourselves and others? This writing-intensive course will explore that question as we gain a sound basic understanding of Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, Islam, and the nature of religion. We'll take four main approaches. First, we'll use scholarly tools that will help us understand religions, others, and ourselves better. Second, we'll learn some of the major concepts that make these religions distinctive, and perhaps make them similar as well. Third, we'll study different kinds of religious texts, from sacred scriptures to a contemporary documentary about rebirth in Tibetan Buddhism. Finally, we'll examine the diverse, changing ways these religions are lived today and portrayed in contemporary media. Students will also have the opportunity to develop skills needed for college-level and professional writing. Writing assignments will explore different prose genres, including a research essay, and each student will create a portfolio of her work to submit for LO2: Basic Writing Competence. Also fulfills LO3: Intercultural Competence A.

## ***RLST Spring 2015 Course Descriptions***

**RLST 102**  
**3.0 credits**

**Religion in Communities**  
**5:00-5:50 T**

**Stacy Davis & Anita Houck**

This new course will introduce students to several religious traditions practiced in the South Bend area. We'll gain a basic understanding of traditions such as Zen Buddhism, Baha'i, Judaism, and Islam; visit several religious sites together, observing sacred spaces and practices; and apply theory about intercultural communication and interreligious dialogue to our observations. Students will then choose to return to a site on their own to learn more about a particular community. Throughout, we'll learn to reflect on our own beliefs and expectations and how they shape our understanding of others. Students must bring an attitude of openness and commit to at least fifteen hours of site visits and experiential sessions outside of class time. Prerequisites: RLST 101 and permission of instructor. If you're interested in the course, please contact one of the instructors: Anita Houck, [ahouck@saintmarys.edu](mailto:ahouck@saintmarys.edu), and Stacy Davis, [sdavis@saintmarys.edu](mailto:sdavis@saintmarys.edu). The course allows students to fulfill Sophia requirements LO3: Intercultural Competence A and Intercultural Competence B.

## **Second Course in Religious Studies**

***All 200-Level fulfill Sophia LO1 Religious Traditions II***

**RLST 232.01,02**  
**3.0 credits**

**Intro to the New Testament**  
**10:00-10:50 MWF**  
**11:00-11:50 MWF**

**John Fotopoulos**

This course will acquaint students with the Christian biblical writings giving attention to their social-historical, literary, and theological characteristics. The New Testament texts will be situated within their respective Jewish Palestinian and Greco-Roman contexts of Jesus and his early followers. Attention will be given to compositional issues and to the subsequent transmission of these writings. To accomplish these aims, this course will introduce students to the academic study of scriptural writings and to the historical-critical tools employed by exegetes in contemporary biblical scholarship. Students will also consider how a small Jewish sect devoted to the messianic prophet Jesus spread throughout the Roman Empire and intersected with the Greco-Roman world. The New Testament writings will provide glimpses into the religious and practical issues that arose when Judaism, Christianity, and paganism intersected in the lives of diverse Christian assemblies.

**RLST 236.01,02**  
**3.0 credits**

**Faith in Action**  
**1:00-1:50 MWF**  
**2:00-2:50 MWF**

**Kurt Buhning**

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 LO3: Academic Experiential Learning.

## ***RLST Spring 2015 Course Descriptions***

**RLST 240.01, 02**  
**3.0 credits**

**Catholic Social Thought**  
**12:30-1:45 TR**  
**2:00-3:15 TR**

**Margaret Gower**

What is the Church's proper role in social and political life? What insight does the Roman Catholic tradition offer in the face of ever more difficult moral quandaries? This course examines the foundational elements of the Church's social tradition and their application to contemporary issues, including the impact of such issues on women inside and outside the Church, as well as on the relationship between one's role as believer and one's role as citizen.

**RLST 261.01, 02**  
**3.0 credits**

**Catholic Faith and Life**  
**9:30-10:45 TR**  
**11:00-12:15 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 21<sup>st</sup> century. It also counts as the following Sophia requirements LO3: Social Responsibility A.

## **Electives**

**RLST 338**  
**1.0 credit**

**Studies in Theology and Film –**  
***Testing Love***  
**6:00-7:50 M (Note: Meeting Dates Jan 20-Mar 3)**

**Sister Elena Malits, CSC**

Love is always tested by difficulty of some sort. Six interesting films that show how love and courage go together. "The Sound of Music," "To Kill a Mockingbird," "The King's Speech," "Its a Wonderful Life," "Rebecca," "Shadowlands."

This class meets seven times, beginning the second Monday of the semester. It is an ALL DISCUSSION course. Requirements: view DVDs before class; study emailed questions; attend all classes; participate in the discussions; write a five page paper at the end of the course.

## ***RLST Spring 2015 Course Descriptions***

**RLST 362**  
**3.0 credits**

**Becoming Women: Religion, Sex, and Gender**  
**TR 2:00-3:15**

**Phyllis Kaminski**

What does it mean when feminist theorists say “we have to become women”? What is the connection between religion, sex, and gender? This course reflects student interests in questions of gender identity, socio-political debates, and the influence of John Paul II’s *Theology of the Body* on young Catholic women. It addresses Saint Mary’s “commitment to women in all their diversity and reflects the conviction that women must be active agents in defining themselves and creating knowledge.”

Beginning with contemporary research and in dialogue with worldwide communities of women, we will explore how race, ethnicity, sex/gender, class, age, figure into religious understandings. In this religious studies/women’s studies class, we will learn and discuss traditional theological positions, current Catholic teaching, and ongoing discussions of issues within and across Christian denominations. Why do Catholics hold certain norms for sexual behavior? How and why does AIDS trouble these norms? Can someone be gay and Catholic? What about these issues in other Christian denominations, beyond Christianity? To that end, we will discuss the *Good Sex Project*, an interfaith, interdisciplinary exploration of sexuality and justice.

The class functions as a seminar with opportunities to discuss openly from a variety of perspectives. There are no tests or exams but, in addition to discussion and debate, there are two short papers and a final paper. Elective for RLST majors, or any interested student who has completed Gen Ed requirements. Counts for the RLST minor and as Gendered Body in GWS.

**RLST 370**  
**3.0 credit**

**Aquinas’ Search for God:  
*Faith Meets Philosophy***  
**3:00-4:15 MW**

**Joseph Incandela**

When Philosophy is used in the service of Theology, wrote St. Thomas Aquinas in the 13th century, “water is turned into wine.” An important strand of the Christian tradition turns the discerning and sometimes critical eye of reason toward the mysteries of faith. For some, this examination occasions strong objections to traditional understandings of whether God is and what God is. For others like Aquinas, rational inquiry is but a way of continuing the journey towards God, a desire of the understanding to lovingly embrace the truths of faith. The meeting place between theological thought and philosophical reflection is where this course takes place. We shall orient our focus around the writings of Aquinas, one of the great minds of history and a man proclaimed by numerous popes “The Universal Doctor of the Church.” We’ll begin the semester with an intensive study of the first several questions in Part 1 of the *Summa Theologiae*. We’ll then follow Aquinas’s deliberations about the nature and extent of God’s knowledge and God’s power. We’ll next study Aquinas’s Christology, his Trinitarian theology, and his ethics; and we will see how the theme of friendship weaves through all of these topics. Finally, we’ll step back and look at what Thomas is saying about faith and its relationship to reason.

The course will be run as a seminar heavily dependent upon student participation, including student communication with each other outside of class through a group audio blog. While the subject matter and approach will be geared towards Religious Studies majors, other students with a solid background in related disciplines are encouraged to enroll. Students taking the course in Spring of 2015 will have a special opportunity to participate in the Symposium on Thomas Aquinas with Fr. Brian Davies, O.P., of Fordham University, who will offer a lecture on January 28<sup>th</sup> on “Thomas Aquinas on God and Evil.”



This course has its own app, “Faith Meets Philosophy,” downloadable for free on the iTunes store or on Google Play (for Android users).

Video promo: <http://tinyurl.com/aquinaspromo>



## ***RLST Spring 2015 Course Descriptions***

**RLST 445**  
**3.0 credits**

**Historical Theology**  
**11:00-11:50 MWF**

**Terence Martin**

One of the most important ways of undertaking the theological task is to converse with “classic texts” from the Christian tradition. While rooted in their own times and responding to their own situations, these classics bear an “excess of meaning” which transcends their period, giving them a certain timeless character. A classic text continues to make demands on later readers, challenging them to understand their lives and their worlds in new ways. Of course, not all theological classics are well known; many are not. But if they are “classics” they will maintain the power to speak and be heard by disclosing something essential about reality and by transforming their readers’ lives. The purpose of this course is to converse with selected classics in the history of the Christian tradition. Specifically, we will take a close look at those authors and texts which have helped to shape the way Christians think about their faith and the manner in which Christians regard the world around them. Our task in each case will be to read these texts against their original historical background, at the same time that we will listen attentively to the questions and answers that they deliver to our own day. Readings will include texts from antiquity, medieval works, reformation writings, and several modern pieces. This course satisfies the requirement in historical theology for Religious Studies majors; and it is appropriate for minors and other interested students who have completed their Religious Studies requirements.

**RLST 458**  
**3.0 credit**

**Theological Ethics Seminar**  
**3:30-4:45 TR**

**Margaret Gower**

In this course we will draw upon classical and contemporary authors as we study fundamental issues in theological ethics, including sources and methods, theological anthropology (the nature of human freedom and action, sociality, and sin), and the relationship between social/political responsibility and Christian faith.

**RLST 486**  
**1.0-3.0 credits**

**Theology/Ministry II: Practicum**  
**6:00-9:00 W**

**Judith Fean**

Supervised ministry in local parishes, hospitals or other pastoral settings is the basis for a weekly reflection seminar. Theological reflection will include the integration of selected readings and shared ministerial or teaching experiences in light of lay ecclesial ministry in the church. Prerequisite: RLST476. Please note: This practicum does not count as one of the two required electives for the Religious Studies major or as one of the courses for the RLST minor, but is required for those majors or minors working towards the Lay Ministry Program. This course fulfills Sophia requirements LO3: Social Responsibility A, and LO3: Academic Experiential Learning.

**RLST 497**  
**1 to 3.0 credits**

**Independent Study**

**Anita Houck**

Permission required

**RLST 998**  
**0 credits**

**Advanced Writing Proficiency**

**Anita Houck**

Permission required

**RLST 999**  
**0 credits**

**Comprehensive examination**

**Anita Houck**

Permission required