

Religious Studies

Fall 2012 - Course Descriptions

Revised July 2012

saintmarys.edu/departments/religious-studies

NOTE: All RLST 101 courses meet the Religious Traditions I requirement in the Sophia Program.

First Course in Religious Studies

RLST 101.01, 02
3.0 credits

Introducing Religious Studies –
Religious Issues in Contemporary Society: God, Self and Other
9:30-10:45 TR
11:00-12:15 TR

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

RLST 101.03, 04
3.0 credits

Introducing Religious Studies –
Conversion
1:00-1:50 MWF
2:00-2:50 MWF

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 biography of Malcolm X, and the literature of Zadie Smith and Tony D'Souza.

RLST 101. 05
3.0 credits

Introducing Religious Studies –
Speaking of God
2:00- 3:15 TR

Phyllis Kaminski

Why study religion? What does it mean to believe in God? How does personal faith relate to religion? Is religious faith a distinct part of life or does it permeate all of existence? Does religion matter? How does religion shape political life (in the United States, in the Middle East, in the world)? How can you as young women believers speak about God in a way that is credible to non-believers? Why should you as a first year college student at Saint Mary's College care?

RLST Fall 2012 Course Descriptions

This course will engage issues such as these as it introduces you to some of the basic sources and skills required for the academic study of religion and responsible theological inquiry. Using *The Faith Club* and inter-religious dialogue as a framework, we will study the dynamic historical nature of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam as we examine various ways in which these faith communities and their members speak of God--in prayer, in history, in texts from sacred scriptures, in religious classics, in religious practice, and in contemporary events. By the end of the semester, you will understand better how religion shapes the way we as women view the world and find meaning in life. You will also have examined aspects common to all religion: prayer, story (sacred texts), symbol, ritual, creed (beliefs), doctrine (teaching), and ethics (decisions and actions that express a commitment to do good). There are tests, papers, oral presentations, and a final exam.

RLST 101.06, 07
3.0 credits

Introducing Religious Studies –
Encounters with the Divine in Ancient Mediterranean Religions
10:00- 10:50 MWF
11:00- 11:50 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, similar and/or divergent religious ideas from contemporary American popular culture are also highlighted 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 101.08,09
3.0 credits

Introducing Religious Studies –
Women in Religious Studies
12:30-1:45 TR
3:30-4:45 TR

Margaret M. Gower

This course examines representations of women in Buddhism, Islam, Judaism, and Christianity. We will approach these religions from scriptural, historical, theological, and theoretical perspectives. Reading scriptures, traditional texts, and historical materials, we will work to recover the lost voices of women in Buddhism, Islam, Judaism, and Christianity at particular historical moments. We will explore the ways in which religious texts and traditions not only respond to but, in fact, create ideas about human persons, women, men, sex, gender, and sexuality.

From there, we will think together about what constitutes "religion" and makes "religion" different from other kinds of human belief and practice, and about what constitutes the category "women," and

RLST Fall 2012 Course Descriptions

makes “women” a meaningful category in social and religious life.

In the end, we will reflect on when and how religions have stood as roadblocks and when and how religions have served as resources for women.

RLST 101.10
3.0 credits

**Introducing Religious Studies –
Exploring Human Religiousness
8:00-9:15 TR**

Sr. Kathleen Dolphin

This course may be described as an exploration of human religiousness. It includes a number of components that will help you develop into a religiously literate woman as you move through your educational experience here.

Throughout the course we will use a methodology for “how to do theology” as a 21st century thinker/believer. This process includes learning how to formulate questions around the nature of the divinity, the nature of the human, and understandings of the relationship between faith and reason.

Because the field of religious studies is by its very nature interdisciplinary, we will look at religion from various angles, addressing such questions as “Does religion have anything to say to science/technology?” and “Can science critique religion effectively?” We will explore the relatively recent work being done regarding history *and* religion (not just history *of* religion). And we will take at least a brief look at religion from other vantage points such as anthropology, sociology, psychology, and philosophy.

In the last analysis, though, it is from the vantage point of **theology** that we approach the large religious questions in this class. We will introduce the tools you will need not only in your further religious studies here at Saint Mary's, but as an intelligent believer in your adult life. These tools include the use of three “sources” of theology; that is, the normative texts such as the Scriptures, the wisdom of the tradition(s) handed on to you, and your own experience.

RLST 101W.11
4.0 credits

**Introducing Religious Studies –
Encountering World Religions
2:00-2:50 MWRF**

Anita Houck

In this course, we'll work to gain a sound basic understanding of Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, Islam, and the nature of religion itself. Besides learning some of the major concepts of each religion, we'll study artistic texts representing each religion; consider how religions are lived in diverse and changing ways today; and practice scholarly approaches to help us understand religions, others, and ourselves better. In the end, we'll hope to answer several questions: What is religion, and how is it different from other ways of looking at human life? How can we come to understand others' ways of seeing and being in the world? Are all religious traditions really the same at their heart, or are the apparent differences important after all? Students will write several kinds of scholarly essays and prepare a portfolio as part of the Basic W program.

RLST Fall 2012 Course Descriptions

Second Course in Religious Studies

RLST 232.01,02
3.0 credits

Introduction to the New Testament
1:00-1:50 MWF
2:00-2:50 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 240.01
3.0 credits

Catholic Social Thought
4:30-5:45 MW

Margaret M. Gower

What is the Church's proper role in social and political life? What are Catholics to think and do in a world which poses ever more difficult moral quandaries? The purpose of this course is to examine the positions taken by Catholic writers on an array of social ethical issues, including political freedom and responsibility, the morality of different economic systems, women's rights, sexual ethics, and the nuclear arms race.

RLST 261.01,02
3.0 credits

Catholic Faith and Life
9:30-10:45 TR
11:00-12:15 TR

Phyllis Kaminski

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 toward Christian experience, in all the theological, doctrinal, spiritual, liturgical, canonical, institutional, and social richness of diversity of that experience. 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.

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? As the whole Church prepares for the 40th anniversary of this historic Council, we will examine its legacy by focusing particularly on Catholicism in the United States. The dynamic interplay of continuity and change in the American 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.

RLST Fall 2012 Course Descriptions

Electives

RLST 307

3.0 credit

**Leviticus and Numbers:
Cultural Interpretations
4:30-5:45 MW**

Stacy Davis

This course is a study of the third and fourth books of the Torah or Pentateuch in the Hebrew Bible, also known as the law. In Jewish tradition, 298 of the 613 commandments, or *mitzvot*, come from Leviticus and Numbers (Cohn-Sherbok 2003: 407-13). The Torah is read weekly in synagogues on an annual cycle, to remind the community of its foundational stories and traditions. Christian theology and scholarship, however, often pay little attention to these books, either dismissing them as outdated historical relics that have no relationship to Christianity or using them as a foil against which the Gospels look modern and progressive. Even the highly esteemed *Anchor Bible Commentary* series had to rely on two Jewish scholars for its commentaries on Leviticus and Numbers. This course will serve as a corrective to common scholarly neglect among Christians by focusing on two of the most important books in Jewish tradition and placing them in conversation with biblical criticism and anthropological theory, in order to appreciate these books both as carefully constructed works of literature and as invaluable sources of information about ancient Israel and contemporary Judaism.

RLST 307 may be used to fulfill the Biblical Studies requirement for the major or as an elective for the minor. The course also counts for Theory of Culture credit in the Intercultural Studies (ICS) program.

RLST 338

1.0 credit

**Studies in Theology and Film:
Mystery in Alfred Hitchcock
6:00-7:30 Mondays (7 consecutive 8/27-10/8)**

Sr. Elena Malits

Hitchcock is the movie master of mystery, in two senses of that word: 1) a who done it? that can be solved; 2) the problem of evil that is theological and beyond our comprehension. We will view and discuss six of Hitchcock's great films: "Rear Window," "Strangers on a Train," "Rebecca," "Vertigo," "Psycho," and "Notorious."

RLST 351

3.0 credit

**Religion and Science
6:00-8:30 W**

Kurt Buhning

Are religion and science in conflict with one another, or should we understand each discipline simply to be asking different questions, using its own method and language? Perhaps religion and science are actually most fruitfully understood as two complementary ways of thinking about the world that have much to learn from one another through encounter?

This course explores the relationship between religion and science, currently and historically, through an examination of various intersections of the two disciplines. Selected topics to be addressed will include: the origins and development of the universe and our planet; who we are as human beings biologically, psychologically, and theologically; and environmental ethics and bioethics. Through these explorations we will seek to come to a richer understanding of the interplay of religion and science and more nuanced conceptions of God, humanity, and the universe.

RLST Fall 2012 Course Descriptions

RLST 370.01
3.0 credit

**Aquinas' Search for God:
Faith Meets Philosophy**
2:00-3:15 TR

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" and celebrated most recently in Pope John Paul II's encyclical, *Faith and Reason*, in which the pope calls faith and reason "two wings on which the human spirit rises to the contemplation of truth." We'll begin the semester with an intensive study of the first thirteen 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. This course will be run as a seminar heavily dependent upon student participation. While it will be geared towards Religious Studies majors, other students with a solid background in related disciplines are encouraged to enroll.

RLST 476.01
3 credits

Theology for Ministry I: Theory
3:00-4:15 MW

Phyllis Kaminski

This course approaches theology and ministry comprehensively. While it has in view those students who might be looking to a commitment to pastoral ministry, religious education, or evangelization, as paid professionals or volunteers, it also looks to students convinced that growth in faith involves the whole person and the community. Theoretical in the most fundamental sense, the course views ministry as a historical practice of sharing faith, one that deliberately attends to the activity of God in our present, to the history of the Christian faith community, and to the coming of God's kingdom "on earth as it is in heaven." You will learn the basic principles of "what makes us Catholic," become acquainted with theological resources for lay ecclesial ministry, and explore ways to engage in what Thomas Groome speaks of as "shared praxis," a collaborative and intentional process that forms, informs, and transforms persons and communities. Theology for Ministry I may be taken on its own. It is also prerequisite for RLST 486, Theology for Ministry II: (a 1 to 3 credit supervised Practicum).

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