

Religious Studies

Fall 2013 - Course Descriptions

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 –
The Plurality of Perspectives on Religion
9:00-9:50 MWF
10:00-10:50 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 101.03, 04
3.0 credits

Introducing Religious Studies –
Encounters with the Divine in Ancient Mediterranean Religions
1:00-1:50 MWF
2:00-2:50 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.

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RLST 101.05, 06, 07
3.0 credits

**Introducing Religious Studies –
*Speaking of God***
9:30-10:45 TR
11:00-12:15 TR
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?

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 101.08, 10
3.0 credits

**Introducing Religious Studies –
*Women in Religion***
3:00-4:15 MW
4:30-5:45 MW

Margaret M. Gower

This course introduces students to Buddhism, Islam, Judaism, and Christianity. We think together about what constitutes "religion" and makes "religion" different from other kinds of human belief and practice. From there, we pay particular attention to women and representations of women in religions. We read women's autobiographies and reflect on religion as roadblock and resource for women.

RLST 101.09
3.0 credits

**Introducing Religious Studies –
*Religious Issues in Contemporary Society: God, Self, and Other***
3:30-4:45 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.

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RLST 101W.11
3.5 credits

Introducing Religious Studies
***Conversion* (In Tandem with PSYC 175W: Introduction to Psychology)**
1:00-1:50 MWF
2:00-2:50 R

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.

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.

This course is taught in conversation with PSYC 157W. As such, both classes will emphasize writing development, the ability to analyze and interpret texts, and the ability to make connections between the psychology theories you will learn and the study of religious conversion. Additionally, conversion theory argues that a study of the person (psychology, including worldviews and mental health) is essential for an understanding of whether, how, and why a person changes or does not change religions. By reading stories of conversion along with psychology texts, you will be able to test that argument.

Second Course in Religious Studies

RLST 225
3.0 credits

Reading the Hebrew Bible in Jewish and
Christian Terms
2:00-2:50 MWF

Stacy Davis

This course is a study of the Bible as a foundation for Jewish and Christian theology and the relationship between the two faiths. It will focus on the Hebrew Bible and how some of its texts and themes are utilized and re-interpreted in the New Testament. We will read selections from the history and theology of the Hebrew Bible found in its 3 divisions (Torah, prophets, and writings) and texts from the inter-testamental period (texts found in the Christian "Old Testament" but not in the Hebrew Bible). We then will examine the incorporation of these foundational stories and concepts in New Testament and early Christian texts. The course will emphasize the similarities and differences between the Hebrew Scriptures and their Christian interpretations and how they affect contemporary readings of Scripture.

Because how individuals read sacred texts shapes not only their own religious tradition but also their interaction with other religious traditions, we will learn how the same biblical text can mean different things in different religious contexts and the effects these different readings may have on inter-religious

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dialogue. In the past, “dialogue” between Jews and Christians often was one-sided, with Christians claiming that they had replaced the Jews as God’s chosen people. We will study both the biblical foundations for such claims and the potential counter-arguments found in other biblical texts for a less combative approach to Jewish-Christian interaction that does not glorify Christianity by using religious language to condemn Judaism.

RLST 225 fulfills the second general education requirement in religious studies; it meets the department’s goal of allowing you to increase your knowledge of a distinctive element of the Roman Catholic Christian tradition, namely the Hebrew Bible and its use as Christian Scripture.

For those choosing to take the course as part of their intercultural studies minor, the course will further the program’s goal of “[helping] students understand the shifting boundaries of culture, nation, race, ethnicity, and institutional structures that shape contemporary social life” (www.saintmarys.edu/~ics) by addressing the effects of religious traditions and beliefs both in intra- and inter-cultural communication, how such communication contributed to the construction of Christian social identity, and how contemporary shifts in Christian traditions and beliefs have led to increased Jewish-Christian dialogue.

RLST 232.01,02
3.0 credits

Introduction 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 240.01,02
3.0 credits

Catholic Social Thought
11:00-12:15 TR
12:30-1:45 TR

Margaret M. 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 240.03
3.0 credits

Catholic Social Thought
2:00-3:15 TR

Joseph Incandela

This course examines Catholic positions on some of the most controversial social, political, ethical, and religious issues of our day: abortion, birth control, the relation between official Catholic teachings and individual conscience, reproductive technologies, cloning, physician-assisted suicide, euthanasia, the allocation of scarce health resources, the ordination of women priests, capital

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punishment, nuclear weapons, waging war vs. embracing peace, poverty and the United States economy, and the effect of being a member of the Church on being a citizen of the state. In each of these areas, we shall be trying to determine what specific difference the Catholic tradition makes for the way we approach these issues. The readings present a wide range of moral and theological points of view. Some of them will be critical of the official Catholic position. But listening to such critical voices is crucial for what we do here: for to understand and evaluate the Catholic position better, we need to listen to non-Catholics; to understand and evaluate theological arguments better, we need to examine secular ones as well. And since many of these issues impact rather directly upon women, it is especially important to hear their voices. I hope you will come away from the course better able to think about these matters and better able to articulate and defend what you think. Because there are different ways of doing ethics within the Catholic tradition, we shall examine and evaluate not only the conclusions that various writers have reached about these issues, but also the kinds of ethical reasoning they use to reach their conclusions. The goal of this course, ultimately, is not just to enable you to reproduce the positions of the Catholic Church, but to produce positions of your own that will enable you to find and evaluate your own place in the Catholic tradition. Note: Extensive use will be made of computer assisted instruction that will include regular readings and postings on the internet.

Electives

RLST 338
1.0 credit

**Studies in Theology and Film:
Some Film Classics**
6:00-7:50 Mondays (7 consecutive 9/2-10/14)

Sr. Elena Malits

This course explores the deepest meanings in six great movie classics of different genres and times: "Casablanca," "The Sound of Music," "It's a Wonderful Life," "The King's Speech," "Babette's Feast," and "On the Waterfront." The class is all discussion with questions provided and final paper of four pages.

RLST 355
3.0 credit

African-American Theologies
6:00-8:30 W

Kurt Buhring

This course will be an engagement with various forms of African-American theologies. Our focus will be on ways in which African-Americans have conceived of the three persons of the Christian Trinity, both constructively and critically. We will consider ways in which the social, historical, cultural, and political contexts relate to developing theologies. To these ends, students will also complete an academic experiential learning project in the community, interacting with a local church and reflecting on and interpreting these experiences in dialectical relation with course readings and discussions.

RLST 362
3.0 credits

Becoming Women: Religion, Sex, and Gender
3:00-4:15 MW

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 (*Sex and The Soul, From the Pews in the Back*), and in dialogue with worldwide communities of women, we will explore how race, ethnicity, sex/gender, class,

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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 a theory course in GWS.

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 497
1.0-3.0 credits

Independent Study
TBA

Kurt Buhring