

# Religious Studies

## Fall 2014 - Course Descriptions

[saintmarys.edu/departments/religious-studies](http://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**  
**3.0 credits**

**Introducing Religious Studies –**  
***The Plurality of Perspectives on Religion***  
**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 101.02,08**  
**3.0 credits**

**Introducing Religious Studies –**  
***Speaking of God***  
**10:00-10:50 MWF**  
**11:00-11:50 MWF**

**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 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, oral presentations, and papers. Also fulfills LO2: Women's Voices.

## ***RLST Fall 2014 Course Descriptions***

**RLST 101.03,04**  
**3.0 credits**

**Introducing Religious Studies –**  
***Ideas and Experiences***  
**1:00-1:50 MWF**  
**2:00-2:50 MWF**

**Margaret M. 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, the good life and ethics, and revelation 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 theological ideas and religious experiences. We attend to plurality and change. In the end, we focus on the experiences of women in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.

**RLST 101.05,06**  
**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 101.07**  
**3.0 credits**

**Introducing Religious Studies –**  
***World Religions in Dialogue***  
**12:30-1:45 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 practice 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. Also fulfills LO3: Intercultural Competence A.

**RLST 101W.11**  
**4.0 credits**

**Introducing Religious Studies –**  
***World Religions in Dialogue (Basic W course)***  
**2:00-3:15 TR**  
**Also meets at 2:00-2:50 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 practice 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

## ***RLST Fall 2014 Course Descriptions***

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.

### **Second Course in Religious Studies**

***NOTE: All RLST 200-level courses meet the Religious Traditions II requirement in the Sophia Program.***

**RLST 225.01,02  
3.0 credits**

**Reading the Hebrew Bible in Jewish and  
Christian Terms  
1:00-1:50 MWF  
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 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 Religious Traditions II requirement in the Sophia Program. It is also an LO3 course, fulfilling the Intercultural Competence (B) and Social Responsibility (B) requirements.

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](http://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 240  
3.0 credits**

**Catholic Social Thought  
3:00-4:15 MWF**

**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 Fall 2014 Course Descriptions***

**RLST 251.01,02**  
**3.0 credits**

**The Christian Tradition**  
**10:00-10:50 MWF**  
**11:00-11:50 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, 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.

### **Electives**

**RLST 307**  
**3.0 credits**

**Leviticus and Numbers**  
**11:00-12:15 TR**

**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:**  
***We All Struggle . . .***  
**6:00-7:50 Mondays (7 consecutive 9/1-10/14)**

**Sr. Elena Malits**

We all struggle...with physical and emotional problems, self-knowledge, relationships, faith, conscience, honesty and injustice. This course explores the religious aspects of these issues in movies such as “The King’s Speech,” “On the Waterfront,” “Doubt,” “Philadelphia,” “Casablanca,” and “To Kill a Mockingbird.”

## ***RLST Fall 2014 Course Descriptions***

**RLST 355**  
**3.0 credit**

**African-American Theologies**  
**2:00-3:15 TR**

**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 355 may be used to fulfill the Systematics requirement for the major or as an elective for the minor. The course also counts in the Justice Education (JE) program and the Intercultural Studies (ICS) program.

**RLST 476**  
**3.0 credits**

**Theology for Ministry 1: Theory**  
**3:00-4:15 MW**

**Phyllis Kaminski**

How do we share full and living faith in the twenty-first century? In particular, what are the theological principles that guide ministry in Christian communities and the processes that foster growth in faith? What is the relationship between baptism and ministry? What is the relationship between lay ministry and the life and mission of the church? Theology for Ministry I: Theory invites you to explore possible answers to such questions. It focuses on understanding Christian life as living one's Baptism. 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. In effect we will be engaging in the relationship of theology and the process of evangelization as it relates to various ministerial settings (lay ecclesial ministry, parish groups, youth ministry, religious education, spiritual ministry in Catholic schools, etc). To the degree that we can, we consider concrete cultural settings and different age levels.

For RLST majors, this course fulfills an elective requirement. It serves as an upper-level course for the RLST minor and is required for those students in the lay ministry certification program. Because of its Catholic theological and pastoral content it also serves as an enriching elective for any student wishing to deepen her understanding of her faith through academic study. Also satisfies Sophia LO3 Social Responsibility A and B.

**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