

Religious Studies

Fall 2015- 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
10:00-10:50 MWF
11:00-11:50 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
3.0 credits

Introducing Religious Studies – *Conversion*
1:00-1:50 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 G. Willow Wilson, the literature of Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, and the biography of Malcolm X.

RLST 101.04
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?

This course will engage such questions 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 speak of God--in prayer, in history, in

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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 practitioners view the world, find meaning, and contribute to the life of their communities. There are tests, papers, oral presentations and a final exam. Also fulfills LO2: Women's Voices.

RLST 101.05.06 **Introducing Religious Studies –** **Kurt Buhring**
3.0 credits ***Religious Issues in Contemporary Society: God, Self, and Other***
9:30-10:45 TR
11:00-12:15 TR

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. Also fulfills LO3: Intercultural Competence A & B.

RLST 101.07 **Introducing Religious Studies –** **Anita Houck**
3.0 credits ***World Religions in Dialogue (Critical Thinking Seminar)***
2:00-3:15 TR

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 also fulfills LO2: Critical Thinking Seminar and LO3: Intercultural Competence A.

RLST 101W.09 **Introducing Religious Studies –** **Anita Houck**
4.0 credits ***World Religions in Dialogue (Basic W course)***
3:30-4:45 TR
Also meets at 2:00-2:50 W

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 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.

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Second Course in Religious Studies

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

**RLST 232.01,02
3.0 credits**

**Introduction to the New Testament
9:00-9:50 MWF
10:00-10:50 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
3.0 credits**

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

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, economic justice, poverty and the United States economy, immigration, the environment, the allocation of scarce health resources, the ordination of women priests, capital punishment, war & peace, 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. 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 online voice postings. Experiential learning will be required either in the South Bend community or through correspondence with death row inmates. This course also fulfills LO3: Social Responsibility A & B; LO3: Academic Experiential Learning. For more, see <http://tinyurl.com/cst-video-ad>.

**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

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traditions and yet tries to remain responsive to novel experiences and external challenges. From the past, we will examine the classical background for Christian notions of God; we will listen in on some early developments in the Christian view of God carved out in dialogue with Hellenistic culture; and we will examine the formation of medieval speculation on God. Turning to the contemporary scene, where we will spend the majority of the semester, we will discuss both Catholic and Protestant texts on God; we will look into the critical and constructive efforts of Christian feminism; and we will take up the new challenges to Christian views of God resulting from Christian-Buddhist dialogue. This course is appropriate for all Saint Mary's students who have completed the core requirement in Religious Studies and satisfies the RLST Major for Systematics.

RLST 497 **Independent Study** **Kurt Buhring**
1 to 3.0 credits

Permission required

RLST 998 **Advanced Writing Proficiency** **Kurt Buhring**
0 credits

Permission required

RLST 999 **Comprehensive examination** **Kurt Buhring**
0 credits

Permission required