

# Religious Studies

## SPRING 2016 - 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, 02**  
**3.0 credits**

**Introducing Religious Studies –  
*Speaking of God***  
**9:30-10:45 TR**  
**11:00-12:15 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 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 101.03**  
**3.0 credits**

**Introducing Religious Studies –  
*World Religions in Dialogue***  
**1:00-1:50 MWF**

**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 the Hebrew Bible to a contemporary documentary about rebirth in Tibetan Buddhism. Finally, we'll examine the diverse, changing ways these religions are lived today, including in interreligious dialogue, and we'll practice 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 101.04**  
**3.0 credits**

**Introducing Religious Studies – *Conversion***  
**11:00-11:50 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

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case studies, specifically the autobiography of G. Willow Wilson, the literature of Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, and the biography of Malcolm X.

**RLST 101.05, 06**      **Introducing Religious Studies –**      **John Fotopoulos**  
**3.0 credits**      ***Encounters with the Divine in Ancient Mediterranean Religions***  
12:30-1:45 TR  
2:00-3:15 TR

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.07**      **Introducing Religious Studies –**      **Anita Houck**  
**4.0 credits**      ***World Religions in Dialogue (Basic W course)***  
2:00-2:50 MWRF

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 the Hebrew Bible to a contemporary documentary about rebirth in Tibetan Buddhism. Finally, we'll examine the diverse, changing ways these religions are lived today, including in interreligious dialogue, and we'll examine how religions are 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 232.01**      **Introduction to the New Testament**      **John Fotopoulos**  
**3.0 credits**      **9:30-10:45 TR**

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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**  
**3:00-4:15 MW**  
**4:30-5:45 MW**

**Kurt Buhring**

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 251.01,02, 03**  
**3.0 credits**

**The Christian Tradition**  
**9:00-10:00 MWF**  
**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,

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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 318**  
**3.0 credits**

**Heaven and Hell**  
**3:00-4:15 MW**

**Anita Houck**

Questions about the afterlife are among the most basic of religion's concerns. These questions are also among the most difficult to address, because we soon find that they bring us to the limits of our knowledge and language. This course is an interdisciplinary introduction to the field of eschatology, the branch of theology that traditionally deals with what are often called "the last things": death, judgment, heaven, and hell. We'll focus on Christian perspectives on these issues from Scripture to the present, and along the way we'll examine how writers, filmmakers, and visual artists have tried to understand and depict the afterlife.

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

**Studies in Theology and Film:**  
***Some Film Classics***  
**6:00-7:50 Mondays (7 consecutive 1/18-3/1)**

**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 five pages.

Note: 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 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 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." It 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.

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/gender and 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 or trans-gender 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.

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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 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