

# Religious Studies

Religious ideas and symbols contribute to many people a sense of purpose in life. The courses engage students in critical analysis of such ideas and symbols. While this study often brings students personal enrichment, the academic study of religion focuses especially on developing skills of critical thinking and clear communication in relation to knowledge of religions. Because of the way that contemporary scholars in this kind of a Roman Catholic department study religion, courses also include serious learning from other Christian perspectives and World Religions. Each option for the core curriculum required course introduces students to these skills in a significant area of knowledge about religious life. Advanced courses allow deeper study of central issues in Christian thought. These courses help to prepare majors for many career opportunities or graduate school programs and help non-majors develop their thinking and communication skills.

Upon graduating, Religious Studies majors should be able, for example, to: understand how religious belief entails ethical responsibility to seek justice for poor and vulnerable people; explain historical influences on theological theories and beliefs; and appreciate the diversity in our world.

## Career Opportunities

Religious studies majors may enter law school, study politics or engage in political activism for peace and justice, and become journalists or chaplains in campus or hospital settings. They also find church-related careers as teachers of religion, directors of religious education programs, youth or family-life ministers, directors of volunteers or of social justice activities, liturgical ministers and pastoral associates.

See the Graduate section (<http://catalog.mtmercy.edu/archives/2015-16/graduateprograms>) of this *Catalog* for more information on Graduate programs offered at Mount Mercy.

## Major

RS 111	Introduction To The Bible: Old Testament	3
RS 113	Introduction To The Bible: New Testament	3
RS 211	Who Is Jesus?	3
RS 312	Modern Christian Thought	3
RS 321	Faith And Moral Life	3
Three of the following: <sup>1</sup>		9
RS 114	Introduction to Christianity	
RS 115	Introduction To World Religions	
RS 284	Topics in Religious Studies	
RS 445	Independent Study	
PL 375	Faith and Reason	
Total Hours		24

<sup>1</sup> Chosen in consultation with the religious studies advisor

## Religious Studies Minor

15 semester hours in Religious Studies electives with at least 6 of the hours numbered at the upper level.

RS 111	Introduction To The Bible: Old Testament	3
RS 113	Introduction To The Bible: New Testament	3
RS 114	Introduction to Christianity	3
RS 115	Introduction To World Religions	3
RS 118	Christians Divided:Conservative Versus Liberal Battles	3
RS 119	Christian Action:Moral Responsibility, Charitable Service, Social Justice	3
Upper Level		6
RS 321	Faith And Moral Life	
RS 445	Independent Study	
RS 211	Who Is Jesus?	
RS 284	Topics in Religious Studies	
RS 312	Modern Christian Thought	

## Courses

### **RS 111 Introduction To The Bible: Old Testament: 3 semester hours**

This course provides a survey of the origin, development, and principal themes of the Old Testament to gain a basic understanding of the foundations of Israelite faith. Methods of contemporary biblical interpretation will be explored and applied in the process of analyzing various types of Old Testament writings.

### **RS 113 Introduction To The Bible: New Testament: 3 semester hours**

A survey of the New Testament, presented within the historical and cultural perspectives of the first-century Christian communities. Methods of contemporary biblical interpretation will be explored and applied in the process of analyzing Paul's letters and the gospels.

### **RS 114 Introduction to Christianity: 3 semester hours**

This course provides an analysis of the phenomenon of Christianity in both its Roman Catholic and Protestant forms in terms of history, major doctrines, rituals and the contributions of seminal theologians.

### **RS 115 Introduction To World Religions: 3 semester hours**

This course provides a consideration of each of the great religions in the context of contemporary society. Variations in the structure, organization, and function of the religions are systematically examined.

### **RS 118 Christians Divided:Conservative Versus Liberal Battles: 3 semester hours**

This course is an investigation of the reasoning behind different Christians' views on controversial issues. Possible issues include these: 1) Did God create exactly the way the Bible says? 2) Can god be called "Mother" as well as "Father"? 3) Can non-Christians be saved? 4) Is homosexuality sinful? 5) Are people born into a state of "original sin?" 6) Is God responsible of evils like wars, earthquakes, and cancer? Students will learn about the different assumptions and arguments employed to defend each of the opposing views on such issues, sharpen the critical thinking skills that investigate the origins of ideas, and analyze different views as to the shared assumptions that make them all expressions of Christian faith.

**RS 119 Christian Action: Moral Responsibility, Charitable Service, Social Justice: 3 semester hours**

An examination of what it means to live Christian faith in three spheres: Personal moral responsibility, charitable service to others (especially needy individuals), and organized efforts to transform societal structures toward greater justice for all. In the first sphere students will analyze different views on what Christianity requires in areas such as sexuality, honesty, non-violence, ect. Students will explore the second sphere through stories of people who devote some or all of their lives to serving others; students will reflect on how far all Christians may be called to go in following these examples. The third sphere will engage students in different views on questions such as, does the most meaningful service require more than handing out food; does it require advocating societal changes that could reduce unemployment and underemployment, ect.

**RS 211 Who Is Jesus?: 3 semester hours**

An exploration of results of modern historical study of the gospels, which provide a better picture of the facts of Jesus' life that Christians have had for the past 19 centuries. This course also analyzes the significance of such historical information for evaluation past and present expressions of Christian belief in Jesus as Lord and Savior. Prerequisite: Fulfillment of core curriculum requirement in Religious Studies.

**RS 284 Topics in Religious Studies: 3 semester hours**

Students will explore a particular topic in the western religious tradition. The topics can be in areas such as the following: the writings of an important thinker (e.g. Thomas Aquinas or Martin Luther), or the religious dynamics of a historical period (e.g. the impact of the reformation or Vatican II on Christian doctrine, practice and organization), or the development of theological or moral doctrines or religious practices (e.g. Women in the Church), or a particular topic in the academic study of the Bible using modern methods of interpretation (e.g. a single book like Genesis, a set of books like the letters of Paul, or a biblical theme like "Covenant" or "Prophecy"). This course may be taken a second time with a different topic. Prerequisites: Fulfillment of core curriculum requirement in Religious Studies.

**RS 312 Modern Christian Thought: 3 semester hours**

An examination of how Roman Catholic and Protestant Christian theologians have responded to the many challenges presented by the modern world. Such challenges include those posed by the Enlightenment, historical consciousness, modernism, the Industrial Revolution, totalitarian regimes, and socio-economic disparity. The course will also consider theological responses to modern forms of atheism, socio-economic criticisms (Marx), psychological criticisms (Freud), gender inequality, ethnic and racial injustices and the awareness of other religious traditions. Prerequisite: fulfillment of core curriculum requirement in Religious Studies and Philosophy.

**RS 321 Faith And Moral Life: 3 semester hours**

An analysis of theological foundation of Christian moral life, including the role of faith, hope and love in Christian formation and motivation. Issues of the authority of biblical and church teachings in relationship to personal responsibility for moral decision-making will be explored. The applicability of the moral principles derived from this study will be tested through consideration of specific areas of contemporary moral debate. Prerequisite: Fulfillment of core curriculum requirements in Religious Studies and Philosophy.

**RS 445 Independent Study: 3 semester hours**

Directed readings and research; topics determined by the student and faculty member.