

RELIGIOUS STUDIES DEPARTMENT

Goals

The religious studies program at Niagara is designed to assist students to understand the religious dimension of human life as it influences persons, cultures and the world. The goals include the development of an understanding of the Judeo/Christian tradition in the spirit of the Catholic and Vincentian heritage of the university. This is accomplished through the exploration of unity and diversity in the dialogue between Christianity and the world religions by study of sacred texts, beliefs, symbols, rituals and communities. The program also explores how religion entails an ethical response to the personal, social, cultural and political problems of our time.

Directives

All students are required to complete successfully three course units (nine semester hours) in religious studies to qualify for a degree in any college of the university. This applies to all students regardless of an individual's religious affiliation.

Courses on the 100 level are restricted to freshmen. Transfer students are required to take a REL 100 course unless they have been granted transfer credit in religious studies. (cf. General Academic Information: Transfer Students and Transfer Credits.)

Freshmen and sophomores may take only one religious studies course per year.

REL courses taken to fulfill a general education distribution requirement cannot double for the university religious studies requirement. Courses on the 400 level are restricted to majors in religious studies.

Religious studies courses fall into four categories. Those categories and the course numbers under each are as follows:

Code	Title	Credits
Comparative Religion		
REL 101	The Search for God	3
REL 206	World Religions	3
REL 246	Religion and Science	3
REL 250	Comparative Religion	3
REL 280	Hieroglyphs to Hashtags	3
REL 306	Judaism & Christianity	3
REL 309	Hinduism & Buddhism	3
REL 370	Islam	3
REL 375	Islam and the West	3
Biblical Studies		
REL 211	Introduction to Hebrew Scriptures	3
REL 219	Introduction to Christian Scriptures	3
REL 304	Gospel and Letters of John (Biblical	3
REL 305	Apocalyptic Literature	3
REL 319	Three Gospels, One Christ	3
REL 326	Paul and His Letters	3
Christianity		
REL 103	Introduction to Christianity	3

REL 216	Jesus the Christ	3
REL 217	Christian Sacraments	3
REL 230	Monastery and Megachurch	3
REL 265	Contemporary Catholic Theology	3
REL 317	Christian Ministry	3
REL 343	Women in Church & Society	3
REL 347	Church and Culture	3
REL 388	Critical Moments in Christian History	3
REL 390	American Catholicism	3
Christian Ethics		
REL 215	Christian Vision of the Human Person	3
REL 256	Christian Morality	3
REL 335	Christian Spirituality	3
REL 356	Marriage and Family Today	3
REL 357	Christian Social Responsibility	3
REL 358	Morality And Medicine	3

Students needing additional advisement about religious studies courses should see the chairperson of the department of religious studies.

Students seeking to choose courses that will offer the possibility for deepening their understanding of Roman Catholic teaching and tradition might do well to consider those courses designated with ** after the course number.

Bachelors

- Religious Studies, B.A. (<http://catalog.niagara.edu/undergraduate/programs-az/arts-sciences/religious-studies/religious-studies-ba/>)

Minor

- Catholic Studies Minor (<http://catalog.niagara.edu/undergraduate/programs-az/arts-sciences/religious-studies/catholic-studies-minor/>)
- Religious Studies, Minor (<http://catalog.niagara.edu/undergraduate/programs-az/arts-sciences/religious-studies/religious-studies-minor/>)

Courses

REL 101 – The Search for God (3 credits)

This course explores some of the common themes and patterns of religion, such as myth, ritual, symbolism, sacred space, and the quest for salvation. Examples are taken from different religions, especially those of the Western/American tradition. The course highlights Catholicism in general and the Vincentian heritage in particular. (Formerly Intro to Religion)

REL 103 – Introduction to Christianity (3 credits)

A survey of the historical and theological development of the Christian religion from its Jewish origins to contemporary American Christianity. There will be an emphasis on the key historical moments and personages that have had a far-reaching impact on the Christian tradition, especially its Roman Catholic dimension. Aspects of the Vincentian heritage will be considered as part of the latter.

REL 206 – World Religions (H) (3 credits)

This course introduces students to the category of world religion and surveys several examples, including Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity, and Islam. Attention is given to the origins, beliefs, practices, and social structures of each tradition.

REL 211 – Introduction to Hebrew Scriptures (CD) (3 credits)

An introduction to the critical interpretation of the Jewish Bible/ Old Testament. The composition and key themes of the individual works of the Bible will be examined in light of ancient Israelite history and religion. The formation of biblical canons in early Judaism and early Christianity will also be considered.

REL 215 – Christian Vision of the Human Person (H) (3 credits)

The course will explore the meaning of human personhood using the theological language of grace, sin, freedom, and conscience, both from traditional and contemporary sources. We will discuss issues of human character as well as current issues in family, church, and society, whose solutions have implication for the dignity of persons.

REL 216 – Jesus the Christ (H) (3 credits)

A study of Jesus as presented in the Gospels, with special emphasis upon Jesus as savior, the resurrection, the role of the cross, and Jesus as revealing the Word of God. Also treated are various theological developments (including the Formula of Chalcedon) in the distinction made between the Jesus of History and the Christ of Faith.

REL 217 – Christian Sacraments (H) (3 credits)

A study of the scriptural, historical, and cultural influences on the development of Christian worship. Beginning with the human experience of worship, the course proceeds to examine the Jewish roots of Christian worship and the various sacraments and rites which Christians celebrate. Special emphasis is given to baptism, confirmation, and the Eucharist, and their relevance for the contemporary Christian.

REL 219 – Introduction to Christian Scriptures (H) (3 credits)

An introduction to the critical interpretation of the earliest Christian literature within the historical, cultural, and social settings of the ancient Mediterranean world in which it was produced. Close reading of primary texts will be emphasized, with a focus on issues of method, and the question of unity and diversity in early Christianity.

REL 230 – Monastery and Megachurch (H) (3 credits)

A comparative look at two branches of Christianity – Orthodoxy ('monastery') and Protestantism ('megachurch'). Topics range from worship styles to questions of salvation.

REL 246 – Religion and Science (H) (3 credits)

Conflict and antagonism between religion and science are neither uncommon nor unusual, yet they have a common origin in the quest for truth and meaning in life. Modern scientific knowledge is required to be objective, logical, empirical, and quantitative. Religion deals primarily with meaning; it gains knowledge through faith, contemplation, and revelation. This course examines the contemporary relationship between religion and science.

REL 250 – Comparative Religion (CD) (3 credits)

This course is an introduction to the comparative study of religion. Using examples from ancient shamanism to contemporary cults, it explores various ways to classify religions and make sense of their similarities and differences.

REL 256 – Christian Morality (H) (3 credits)

A Christian understanding of the human person as a basis for moral thought and action is applied to contemporary moral issues, with emphasis on human sexuality, health care, ethics, and issues of adult moral development.

REL 265 – Contemporary Catholic Theology (H) (3 credits)

A study of the social history and thought of the community of the Beloved Disciple through literary, rhetorical, and historical-critical examination of the Fourth Gospel and the Johannine epistles. Special focus will be given to comparison of this form of Christianity to other forms of early Judaism and Christianity, with particular attention to Gnosticism.

REL 280 – Hieroglyphs to Hashtags (CD) (3 credits)

This course explores the interface between writing and religion. Possible topics include the mythic origins of writing; missionary and mystical alphabets; calligraphy traditions around the world; digital fonts and graphic design.

REL 304 – Gospel and Letters of John (Biblical) (H) (3 credits)

A study of the social history and thought of the community of the Beloved Disciple through literary, rhetorical, and historical-critical examination of the Fourth Gospel and the Johannine epistles. Special focus will be given to comparison of this form of Christianity to other forms of early Judaism and Christianity.

REL 305 – Apocalyptic Literature (H) (3 credits)

An in-depth study of the Book of Revelation through its background (Hebrew Bible/Old Testament, Inter-Testamental Literature, Qumran, New Testament) as well as through detailed study of the text.

REL 306 – Judaism & Christianity (H) (3 credits)

An in-depth study of the emergence of Judaism and Christianity from the religion of the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures, their process of achieving independent self-definition, and the effect of this independence upon their past, present, and future relations.

REL 309 – Hinduism & Buddhism (H) (3 credits)

An exploration of the central religious tradition of India, as well as the origins of the wisdom of Buddhism. The development within Buddhism of the Theravada and Mahayana (e.g., Zen, Tibetan Buddhism, etc.) vessels of thought are studied. The values, rituals, and practices of these religions are examined through art, classic writings, and spiritual techniques.

REL 315 – Prophecy in Ancient Israel (H) (3 credits)

A study of the prophetic dimension of ancient Israelite society and religion from its origins through the post-exilic period. Special attention will be given to close reading of the primary evidence, with an eye to the political, socioeconomic, and religious crises that Israel's prophets perceived, interpreted, and addressed.

REL 317 – Christian Ministry (H) (3 credits)

A study of the scriptural, historical, and cultural influences on the development of ministry in Christianity. This exploration of the origins and evolution of ministry, and the various forms it has taken from the New Testament period to the present, enables a critical reflection on current trends and concerns for both lay and ordained ministry.

REL 319 – Three Gospels, One Christ (H) (3 credits)

*Prerequisite Take REL*101 or REL*103*

A literary and historical study of the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke, including the hypothetical Synoptic Sayings Source Q. The literary relationship between these texts will be explored, and the distinctive narrative and theological features of each will be investigated.

REL 326 – Paul and His Letters (H) (3 credits)

An examination of Paul's letters through the lenses provided by contemporary biblical criticism. Special attention will be given to the social circumstances in which they were written, their rhetorical aims, the religious and ethical thought they manifest, and, finally, Paul's legacy in subsequent Christianity.

REL 335 – Christian Spirituality (H) (3 credits)

Christian spirituality, often described as the lived experience of the Christian faith, is systematically analyzed from biblical, historical, theological, and cultural perspectives. Special emphasis is given to Christian spirituality's contribution to an understanding of God, self, community, and the promotion of justice and peace.

REL 340 – Religion and Art (H) (3 credits)

*Prerequisite Take REL*101 or REL*103 prior*

This course explores some of the intersections between the worlds of religion and the visual arts. Students will gain an understanding of foundational concepts in the field such as religious vs. sacred art, aniconic vs. iconic art, high art vs. folk art, as well as statuary and the architecture of sacred space. In this course students will take advantage of local resources including the Castellani Museum's permanent collection, Niagara University's Alumni and Gacioch Center chapels, the Buffalo Museum of Religious Art, as well as Our Lady of Victory Basilica in order to conduct independent research using primary visual materials.

REL 343 – Women in Church & Society (H) (3 credits)

A survey of issues pertinent to the life and role of women in the church and society, with special focus on equality, development, and peace.

REL 347 – Church and Culture (SS) (3 credits)

This course examines the Church from an international perspective. It focuses on the relationship between Church, culture and belief, aware how the context in which the church exists shapes its expression. Key is the Church is not just Western, in North America and Europe, but also Latin American, Asian and African. It asks the place of Christian belief in secular society, as well as how Christian life is expressed in the diversity of cultures across the world and the challenges confronting the church and people in various contexts.

REL 356 – Marriage and Family Today (SS) (3 credits)

The meaning of human love experience: its expression in human sexuality, the conditions within which this value is experienced, the relationship of human sexuality and marriage, and marriage as the sign of the unity among people with God is discussed in its sacramental, psychological, physiological, moral, and social aspects.

REL 357 – Christian Social Responsibility (H) (3 credits)

This course will examine the relationship between Christian belief and citizenship, including the exploration of social responsibility in one's personal ethical code. We will study church teaching on social issues as well as examine a range of contemporary social problems.

REL 358 – Morality And Medicine (SS) (3 credits)

A study of current medical and biological issues from the viewpoint of Christian ethics. An examination of contemporary moral and legal problems such as eugenic engineering, artificial insemination, compulsory sterilization, and abortion. Recommended for premedical and prelaw students.

REL 370 – Islam (CD) (3 credits)

This course is a research-based exploration of the religious tradition of Islam, and is intended to go beyond a basic introduction. Special emphasis will be placed on the foundational texts, individuals, and concepts of Islam. Islam in the modern world will also be considered with its classical foundations in mind.

REL 375 – Islam and the West (CD) (3 credits)

This course is a research-based exploration of the religious tradition of Islam as it has been shaped and imagined by Christendom and its heir, The West. Basic concepts such as the Islamic Civilization and Western Civilization will be explored, as well as the cultural religious encounters from the time of Islam's beginning in the seventh century to the current Clash of Civilizations.

REL 388 – Critical Moments in Christian History (H) (3 credits)

An in-depth study of the history of the Christian Church from its apostolic days to the Middle Ages. The course will examine the development of Christian doctrine, the evolution of Church structures, and the relationship of the Church to society and culture during the first 1500 years of its existence.

REL 390 – American Catholicism (H) (3 credits)

This course will address the history and theology of Catholics in the United States as well as the issues which have confronted the church in America. Special emphasis will be placed on contemporary issues in the final unit of the course.

REL 392 – 20th Century Catholicism (H) (3 credits)

A survey of the historical and theological dimensions of the Second Vatican Council. The course will consider historical background, as well as the salient moments in, significant contributors to, and major pronouncements of, this major cultural and religious event of the 20th century. It will also investigate the debate over its spirit and teaching as they continue to impact Roman Catholics, Christians, and members of other religions.

REL 399 – Topic: (3 credits)

This course is designed as a one-time course. It will deal with special topics in religion, theology, church history, morality, or scripture according to the research agenda and interests of a particular professor.

REL 403 – Honors Thesis I (3 credits)

Individual research of a substantive nature pursued in the student's major field of study. The research will conclude in a written thesis or an original project, and an oral defense.

REL 404 – Honors Thesis II (3 credits)

Individual research of a substantive nature pursued in the student's major field of study. The research will conclude in a written thesis or an original project, and an oral defense.

REL 493 – Rel. Studies Co-op (6.00 credits)

A junior or senior work-study program providing relevant employment experience. Registration will occur at the beginning of the experience. The objective of the program is to integrate classroom theory and practical work experience, thus lending relevancy to learning and providing the student with a realistic exposure to career opportunities. Students interested in taking an internship or co-op should talk with their adviser.

REL 494 – Rel. Studies Co-op (6.00 credits)

A junior or senior work-study program providing relevant employment experience. Registration will occur at the beginning of the experience. The objective of the program is to integrate classroom theory and practical work experience, thus lending relevancy to learning and providing the student with a realistic exposure to career opportunities. Students interested in taking an internship or co-op should talk with their adviser.

REL 498 – Independent Study (3 credits)

Student development of a research project under the guidance of a mentor, and with permission of the chairperson of the department and dean of the college. Research paper required.

REL 499 – Senior Seminar (3 credits)

Majors will complete an individually tailored research project which will apply the department's holistic approach to the study of religion to a specific topic determined by the majors and their advisers and approved by the chairperson. Research paper required.