RELIGIOUS STUDIES

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Throughout human history, religion has played an enormous role in the shaping of human actions and perceptions, as well as social institutions and values. The academic study of religion involves a sympathetic yet critical examination of the human attempt to answer the questions, “Who are we and why are we here?” It also allows us to understand better the complex world in which we live. The study of religion uses the methods of several disciplines, including theology, philosophy, history, psychology, sociology, anthropology, and literary criticism. Methodologically and topically diverse, the Master of Arts in Religious Studies (MARS) program is unified by its commitment to the task of exploring the basic religious beliefs and insights that render human life and experience meaningful. Specific courses in the program examine the various symbols and myths, rituals and creeds, and events and institutions that illuminate the religious imagination and understanding. The student who completes the MARS program will be able to engage in critical dialogue with his/her own religious tradition and other traditions; understand these traditions in their complexity; and articulate coherent, religiously informed answers to basic questions of human meaning.

Goals and Objectives

The Graduate Program in Religious Studies is designed to suit the needs and interests of a wide variety of students. Whether one wishes to prepare for doctoral work in religion, pursue a career in religious education, or learn more about the world’s religious traditions in order to enrich one’s personal and/or professional life and activities, the program supplies a broad range of valuable resources. Each graduate student, in consultation with a faculty advisor, is encouraged to plan an appropriate course of study. In addition to the goal of intellectual enrichment, this program has proven particularly beneficial in the professional advancement of educators, writers, human resource and personnel administrators, government employees, spiritual directors, and directors of religious education. It also offers a strong foundation for students contemplating further study toward a doctoral degree or the ministry.

Admission Requirements

Applicants must have a strong undergraduate record from an accredited college or university with a degree preferably in the humanities or social sciences. A student with an undergraduate degree in any major outside the Humanities must have taken at least two courses in Humanities disciplines such as theology/religion, philosophy, history, and literature. Official transcripts from all undergraduate and graduate institutions attended must be sent by those institutions to the Office of Graduate Admissions. Two letters of recommendation must accompany the application. A personal interview is required as part of the admission process. The Graduate Record Examination (GRE) is recommended for all applicants, and in some circumstances it may be required.

M.A. Thesis

Upon completing coursework, each MA student must write a master’s thesis. The thesis is a formal document that shows the student has made an original contribution to knowledge. Writing the thesis is a learning experience in which the student draws upon integrated knowledge of religious studies and research skills to present a distinctive interpretation of a problem in the field. The process typically requires a semester’s worth of planning and a semester’s worth of writing, under the direction of an advisor. See the program director to receive a full
set of guidelines and to be matched with an advisor.

**Degree Requirements**

All MA candidates must complete a total of 36 credit hours of graduate coursework, with a minimum GPA of 3.0. Student performance is reviewed by the graduate faculty at the end of each semester. If a student completes all coursework for the degree with a GPA below 3.0, then the student will be allowed to take a maximum of six additional credit hours of study to raise the average to 3.0. If this 3.0 average is not achieved, the student will not be allowed to continue in the program and no degree will be awarded. If a grade below C is earned in a required course, that course must be repeated. If a grade below C is earned in an elective course, the student must repeat that course or take another elective. In any case, the original grade is calculated into the GPA.

**Required Courses**

- **TRS 600** Research in the Study of Religion (3 credits)
- **TRS 610** Philosophical Frameworks for the Study of Theology and Religious Studies (3 credits)
- **TRS 501-504, One course in Biblical Studies** 601-605
- **TRS 520-523, One course in Theology and Spirituality** 530-533, 620-628, 630-636
- **TRS 540-543, One course in Ethics** 640-645
- **TRS 560-564, One course in World Religions and Comparative Studies** 570-574, 660-664, 671-672
- Free electives (15 credits)
- MA Thesis (3 credits)

**Course Descriptions**

**FOUNDATIONAL COURSES**

**TRS 600 Research in the Study of Religion**
3 CH
Prepares the student for graduate-level work in religion. Provides opportunities to apply various research methods used in the field, including history, surveys, ethnographies, literary criticism, and philosophical/theological analysis. Develops customs of writing and citation for publications in religious studies and theology.

**TRS 610 Philosophical Frameworks for the Study of Theology and Religious Studies**
3 CH
Focuses on contemporary methods for the investigation of religion and prepares the student for graduate-level work.

**ELECTIVE COURSES**

†**TRS 501 - Introduction to the Old Testament**
3 CH
Literary and historical study of the Old Testament, also known as the Hebrew Bible in Judaism. Relationship of literary form and interpretation in passages from the Pentateuch, historical and prophetic books, and wisdom literature. Comparison and contrast of theological meanings of these writings for Jews and Christians.

†**TRS 502 - Introduction to the New Testament**
3 CH
Literary, historical, and theological study of the New Testament. Included topics: the origin, formation and development of the Gospels and letters; various types of interpretation; the distinctive views of the New Testament writers about Jesus’ life, teachings, death, and resurrection.
†TRS 503 - Introduction to the Gospels
3 CH
This course is an introduction and examination of the synoptic Gospels and the Gospel of John. The course will explore contemporary methods used by scholars and the Church to interpret these texts.

†TRS 504 - The Letters of Paul
3 CH
Examines the social and religious world of St. Paul, his biography, his writings in the New Testament, and how these influenced the developing Christian church.

†TRS 520 - Introduction to Catholic Theology
3 CH
Introduces fundamentals of Catholic life and thought. Key doctrines examined are scripture, tradition, God/Trinity, Jesus Christ, sacraments, and the Church in the modern world. Additional topics might include ethics, spirituality, and the saints. Placed in historical context, Catholic theological reasoning about these doctrines is compared to theology in other branches of Christianity.

†TRS 521 - Understanding Theology
3 CH
An introduction to the nature and role of theology. Investigates both academic, or “public,” theology and confessional, or “church-centered,” theology.

†TRS 522 Faith and Reason in the Catholic Tradition
3 CH
This course investigates the relationship between faith and reason. In what ways are faith and reason compatible and what is the history of the interaction between theology and academic disciplines such as those in the natural and social sciences?

†TRS 523 - Sacraments
3 CH
Explores the history of the sacraments, the theology behind them and their role in contemporary Catholic life.

†TRS 530 - History of Christianity I
3 CH
Traces the history of the Christian faith from the New Testament period to the Middle Ages. Major issues, controversies, and persons from these centuries are studied.

†TRS 531 - History of Christianity II
3 CH
Traces the history of the Christian faith from the Middle Ages to the present time. Major issues, controversies, and persons from these centuries are studied.

†TRS 532 - Christian Spirituality
3 CH
Presents spirituality as a topic worthy of study, plumbs its meaning through selections from the writings of great spiritual masters through the centuries—for example, Augustine, John of the Cross, Theresa of Avila, Ignatius Loyola, Teilhard de Chardin, and Thomas Merton.

†TRS 533 - Women in Christianity
3 CH
A theological, textual and gender-based examination of women in the history of Christianity, incorporating critical analysis of texts written about and by Christian women. Topics include the image of women and woman’s spirituality in the Bible, writings of the Church Fathers, mystics, sectarian movements, and the feminist reconstruction of tradition.

†TRS 540 - Foundations of Catholic Ethics
3 CH
Explores the historical sources and methods of reasoning in the Roman Catholic moral
tradition. Critically examines current moral issues in Catholicism.

†TRS 541 - History of Christian Ethics  
3 CH  
The ethical reflections of some of the most influential Christian thinkers from the Church Fathers to the present (e.g., Augustine, Thomas Aquinas and Martin Luther) applied to various important topics of ethical debate in Christian history (e.g., the notion of just war).

†TRS 542 – The Catholic Social Justice Tradition  
3 CH  
The social-ethical teachings of the Catholic tradition, especially since Pope Leo XIII’s letter On the Condition of Labor in 1891. Course explores Catholic social teaching that emerges from Church documents, traces it application to many issues of social and political conflict, and considers how this teaching is challenged by the perspectives of women, minorities, and people in developing countries.

†TRS 543 – Ethics in World Religions  
3 CH  
Examination of core ethical teachings and methods in several world religions. These resources guide ethical analysis of conflicted issues in contemporary society, such as economic inequality, racism, violence, sexual ethics, and bioethics.

†TRS 560 - Eastern Religions  
3 CH  
Explores history, beliefs and practices of Hinduism, Buddhism and other religions of India, China and Japan and the emergence of the contemporary New Age movement.

†TRS 561 - Islam  
3 CH  
A theological and phenomenological exploration of beliefs, practices, and symbology of Islam, incorporating extensive readings from the Qur’an, the hadith and shari’a, and Sufism. This course analyzes contemporary topics such as religion and gender, and religion and politics.

TRS 562 - Judaism  
3 CH  
Key components of the complex religion of Judaism, including: Biblical foundations, historical development, theological considerations, rituals and symbols, calendar and holidays, Jewish Mysticism, prayer, denominations, and life cycle events. Explores the role of God in the life of Jews past and present; compares the meaning of Judaism then and now.

†TRS 563 - Symbol, Myth and Ritual  
3 CH  
Notions of symbol, myth and ritual, as well as an introduction to the use of symbols, myths and rituals in a wide variety of religious traditions.

†TRS 564 - Ancient Religions and Cults  
3 CH  
Explores the beliefs, practices, and teachings of ancient world religions including those of ancient Egypt and Mesopotamia; the mystery cults of the ancient Greco-Roman civilizations, and the religious traditions of pre-Christian northern Europe (Scandinavia) and ancient Iran. Studies sacred writings of these religions, with emphasis on topics such as deities and divine powers, rituals of birth and death, gender studies, and the relationships between ancient faith traditions and the emergence of monotheism.

†TRS 570 - Religion in America  
3 CH  
Examines the historical factors responsible for distinctive trends in American religion and identifies common threads that run through the religious history of America from the Puritans to today.
†TRS 571 - Celtic Religious Traditions
3 CH
The mythic history of Ireland and “beginning” of the Irish, and the traditions by which the Irish have come to identify themselves and give meaning to their world. Study of the religious function of social institutions; gods, goddesses and ruling powers; holy places; feasting and sacrifice; spirits and ancestors; and the other world. Also considered is the role of women in these traditions and the continuation of “myth” in modern Ireland.

†TRS 572 - Death and Dying in the World Religions
3 CH
All religious traditions have regarded the process of dying and the result of bodily death as significant events—as natural but also sacred states of being that impart to earthly life its deepest meaning and value. Course explores religious beliefs about, and practices developed around, human dying, death and any subsequent conditions of existence.

†TRS 573 - Religion and Sexuality
3 CH
Examines the relationship between religion and sexuality in various world religions. Topics include asceticism vs. eroticism; defining normality and deviance; sex as a means to challenge or maintain the social order; religious responses to the changing sexual morality in contemporary Western society.

†TRS 574 - Religion, Health and Healing
3 CH
Explores theories and practices of healing in Eastern, Western and Primal religions. Examines research on connections between religion and health and efficacy of alternative and spiritual therapies.

†TRS 582 – Religion in Literature
3 CH
Explores religious dimensions in the fiction of 20th century and contemporary novelists and short story writers, and possibility in other literary formats, such as poetry and memoir.

†TRS 583 – Religion in Film
3 CH
Explores the religious dimensions of a wide range of films, many of which are screened in class then discussed. The course considers both subject matter and style/techniques.

†TRS 584 - Cults, Sects and New Religious Movements
3 CH
Explores beliefs and practices of new religions in America, including Mormonism, Unification Church, Christian Science, Scientology, Theosophy, New Age, Neopaganism and UFO cults. Presents both sociological and theological approaches to understanding new religions.

†TRS 599 - Special Topics in Religion
3 CH
Designates new or occasional courses that may or may not become part of the department’s permanent offerings. Courses capitalize on a timely topic, a faculty member’s particular interest, an experimental alternative to existing courses, etc. Prerequisites established by the department as appropriate for the specific course. Course title is shown on the student’s transcript. Consult the current course schedule for available topics and prerequisites.

†TRS 601 - Death and Resurrection of Jesus
3 CH
Traces the development of the traditions of the passion, death, and resurrection of Jesus as they are found in the gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John.
†TRS 602 - The Historical Jesus
3 CH
Investigates what can be known of the historical Jesus—the form of his teaching, his message, his actions—through a proper methodological examination of the sources. Jesus and his follower are understood in the context of the history, cultural, and religion of his day.

†TRS 603 - The Gospel of John
3 CH

TRS 604 - New Testament Ethics
3 CH
This course is an examination of the ethical teachings found in the New Testament, and their legacy.

†TRS 605 – Scripture in the Life of the Church
3 CH
A overview of the entire biblical canon, an introduction to historical-critical study of the Bible, and consideration of the Catholic Church’s contemporary methods for study and interpretation of Scripture.

†TRS 620 - Christology
3 CH
Examines the theological interpretation of Jesus as the Christ in the history of the Christian tradition.

†TRS 621 - The Church: Catholic Perspectives
3 CH
An investigation of Catholic thinking and teaching about the nature of the Church.

†TRS 622 - The Christian Trinity
3 CH
Examines the Christian theological conception of God as a trinity of persons.

How has this theological understanding of God developed over time? How does theology explain the Christian worship of one God who is also three?

†TRS 623 - Theology and the Human Person
3 CH
Investigates theological conception of the human person in light of Christian revelation, and asks: In what way is a person like God? What do we mean by human nature, sin, grace, and free will? Can the traditional Christian and the modern scientific notions of humanity be reconciled?

†TRS 624 - Eschatology
3 CH
Investigates the varied aspects of Christian eschatology—that is, the unfolding of the future, in relation to the cosmos and to the individual. When, how, and why does the world end and where does the individual fit into all this? Topics covered include theological discussions of time, the future, the human soul, death, the intermediate stage, and the journey of the Christian community and the human family into the future.

†TRS 625 - Faith and Science
3 CH
Explores history and interaction between Catholic theology and science in the medieval, modern, and contemporary era. The interaction is studied in the context of such topics as: cosmology, evolution, ecology, and technology.

†TRS 626 - Constructing the Concept of God
3 CH
Imaginative construction of a concept of God appropriate for modern life.

†TRS 627 - Contemporary Roman Catholic Thought
3 CH
Various thinkers and movements that have
shaped contemporary Roman Catholic life and thought, including Karl Rahner, the Second Vatican Council and liberation theology.

†TRS 628 - Contemporary Protestant Thought
3 CH
Some of the most important Protestant theologians of the 19th and 20th centuries, including Kierkegaard, Schleiermacher, Barth and Tillich.

†TRS 630 - Mysticism
3 CH
This course introduces the student to the dimension of spirituality known as mysticism, through readings in and critical analysis of mystical texts of the world's religions, including Tao te Ching, the Hindu Upanishads, Zohar and other Kabbalistic texts, the poets of Sufism, and Christian mystics from the history of Christianity.

†TRS 631 – Monks, Hermits, and Warriors
3 CH
Introduces the dimension of Christian faith often termed “the religious life.” Studies the historical development of monasticism in the West and its various manifestations, from late antiquity to the modern era.

†TRS 632 - Medieval Theology
3 CH
A critical examination of central doctrines of Christianity, Judaism, and Islam as they developed during the Middle Ages. This course analyzes particular modalities of theological expression such as mysticism, sacred art/architecture, and women’s visionary writings.

†TRS 633 – Women in Celtic Christianity
3 CH
Examines the complex encounter between women and the diverse traditions of Celtic spirituality. Historical scope of the course runs form pre-Christian traditions to contemporary times, with emphasis on primary texts.

†TRS 634 - Catherine and Teresa
3 CH
Catherine of Siena (14th cen.) and Teresa of Avila (16th cen.) are esteemed for enriching the life of the Catholic Church with their theological writings and their distinctive spiritual gifts. Explores the significant contributions of both women in the context of their respective historical and religious milieus, as well as their Dominican and Carmelite spiritualties.

†TRS 635 - Spiritual Teachers and Thinkers
3 CH
Explores the representative spiritual writings of a specific religious teacher from the history of the world’s religions. Examples of such spiritual teachers include Hildegard of Bingen, Meister Eckhart, George Fox, Teresa of Avila, Ibn al’Arabi, and Martin Buber. Consult instructor for relevant topic.

†TRS 636 – Theology and Native Irish Spirituality
3 CH
Celtic Christianity is a tradition rich in its own history and particularities within the broader culture of the Western Church, and so it is certainly worthy of a focused exploration. The course will include a study of the general history and theological peculiarities of the Celtic Church within Celtic cultures and geographies, with a particular focus on Irish spirituality and Irish Christianity.

†TRS 640 - Bioethics: Religious Approaches
3 CH
Using methods and principles of biomedical ethics, explores several ethical issues in medical practice and health care policy. Frameworks employed include religious-ethical perspectives in Christianity and some other religious traditions, as well as philosophical and social theories. Topics
may include: euthanasia, reproductive technologies, confidentiality, human subjects, and allocation of health care resources.

†TRS 641 - Religion, War and Peace
3 CH
An examination of ethical attitudes toward war and peace embraced by Christianity, Islam, and other religions. Just war theory and pacifism are applied to contemporary problems of violence.

†TRS 642 - Human Rights
3 CH
Investigates philosophical and religious theories of human rights, the modern history of rights, and ways to implement a human rights agenda.

†TRS 643 - Philanthropy as Moral Action
3 CH
Presents the ethics, theology, and political philosophy undergirding philanthropy. Provides an opportunity to develop skills of social entrepreneurship by studying or volunteering in local nonprofits.

†TRS 644 - Virtue Ethics
3 CH
The study of moral character. Course investigates the philosophy and theology of virtue throughout history; the value of the social and natural sciences for understanding virtue; and the social dimensions of virtue.

†TRS 645 - Religion and Environmental Justice
3 CH
Examines how religion has shaped humanity’s relationship with nature, and explores various religious and ethical responses to contemporary ecological problems. The course also attends to Christianity, which is criticized by some environmentalists but has also given rise to its own environmentalist movement.

†TRS 660 - Women in World Religions
3 CH
An analysis of women’s role in Christianity, Judaism, Hinduism, and Islam—both historical and contemporary—using theories and methods of gender study.

†TRS 661 - Women in Islam
3 CH
This course examines the theological, anthropological and cultural encounter between women and Islam from an historical as well as contemporary perspective. Dismissing polemics, and grounding study on writings by and about Muslim women across the full scope of the Islamic world, the course will explore particularly how Muslim women have realized and their faith and engaged in patterns of religious practice.

†TRS 662 - Women in American Religion
3 CH
A critical analysis of women and religion within the context of American history and culture. This course examines religious writings/narratives by Native American women, and American women in Christianity, Judaism, and Islam. The impact of race, class, history, and/or ethnicity upon religious experience is also explored in the writings of feminist, Womanist (African-American) and Mujerista (Latina) theologians.

†TRS 663 - Pilgrimage and Sacred Journeys
3 CH
Introduces the religious ritual activity of pilgrimage, a spiritually inspired journey in time and over space. The concept is studied in several religions and from several methodological angles that occur in many religious traditions.

†TRS 664 - Religion in Contemporary Ireland
3 CH
Examines complex factors involved in shaping religion in contemporary Ireland. The changing face of Irish religious sensibility is
situated within such factors as: Irish history, the major role of Catholicism in the culture, and the multicultural dimensions of 21st century Ireland.

†TRS 671 - Christian-Jewish Relations  
3 CH  
Examines the historical and theological relationship between Judaism and Christianity over the centuries. Attention is paid to the recent positive strides in interreligious understanding since Second Vatican Council.

†TRS 672 - Contemporary Religious Thinkers  
3 CH  
Representative writings of a specific religious thinker. Focus is on the work of either an important theologian or a contemporary scholar of religion. Consult the course instructor for the topic.

†TRS 681 American Evangelicalism  
3 CH  
History and character of evangelicalism, a distinctive variety of Protestant Christianity that has had a major influence on the U.S. Topics include fundamentalism, impact on major social movements, and the political influence of evangelicals today.

†TRS 682 - North American Christianities  
3 CH  
Examines several American Protestant Christian movements that proposed new scriptures and new understandings of Christianity, for instance, the Shakers, Mormons, and Spiritualists. Asks how Christianity has adapted to cultural changes in areas such as work, education, family life, and health care.

†TRS 683 - Holocaust: Genocide and Religion  
3 CH  
Analysis of the Holocaust and other 20th century genocides (Rwanda, Bosnia) with a focus on religion as a dimension of the causes of genocide. Assesses degrees of accountability for genocide among religious populations, both lay and clerical.

†TRS 684-385 - Elementary Ecclesiastical Latin I and II  
3 CH  
Provides foundation in the vocabulary, morphology, and grammar of Latin as used in Catholic Church documents and liturgies.