

# RELIGIOUS STUDIES AND THEOLOGY

## Department Description

The program in Religious Studies and Theology invites students to explore the big questions about life, death, love, sin, freedom, grace, peace, justice, God, and the human community. Courses not only explore the religious dimensions of life but also endeavor to cultivate the skills and methods necessary to the study of religion and theology.

## Study Abroad

Saint Mary's has a long history of providing quality international programs as an essential part of our educational mission—forming women leaders who will make a difference in the world. As this world becomes increasingly interdependent, the College offers an expanding range of semester, year, semester break, and summer study and service programs in a wide variety of countries, and encourages students to take advantage of them. Learn more about the various Study Abroad opportunities (<https://catalog.saintmarys.edu/undergraduate/academic-life/international-programs/>).

## Programs

- Religious Studies and Theology, Bachelor of Arts - RLST (<https://catalog.saintmarys.edu/undergraduate/programs/religious-studies/religious-studies-bachelor-arts/>)
- Religious Studies and Theology, Minor - RLST (<https://catalog.saintmarys.edu/undergraduate/programs/religious-studies/religious-studies-minor/>)

## Department Chair

Stacy Davis  
164E Spes Unica Hall  
574-284-4700

## Faculty

K. Buhring, J. Coblenz, S. Davis, J. Fotopoulos, M. Gower, A. Houck

## Student Learning Outcomes

A major or minor in Religious Studies and Theology does the following:

- Reads critically and analyzes texts pertaining to the study of religion, whether sacred, classical, or contemporary.
- Explains ways in which historical and cultural contexts affect the development of religious traditions.
- Articulates and defends her own line of interpretation and criticism regarding religious questions and texts pertaining to religion.
- Synthesizes examples, facts, issues, or theories within her studies in religious studies and theology, as well as articulates connections, where appropriate, to what she has learned in her other areas of study.
- Identifies some of the major figures, central issues of debate, and most important schools of thought in the field of religion and the discipline of theology; accurately articulates the positions they express; and explains their significance.

- Understands and uses specialized language accurately in analyzing, critiquing, and developing arguments.

## Religious Studies and Theology Courses

Note: Courses at the 200 level are open only to those Saint Mary's College students who have completed their Religious Traditions I Sophia requirement.

Note: Courses at the 300-400 level are open only to those Saint Mary's College students who have already satisfied their Religious Traditions I and II Sophia requirements.

### RLST 101 Introducing Religious Studies (3)

This course introduces students to the study of religion and theological inquiry. Through a variety of sources it explores the meaning of religion in personal and cultural life.

### RLST 102 Religion in Communities (1)

An introduction to several religious traditions practiced in the South Bend area and the skills needed to reflect on how our own beliefs and expectations shape our understanding of others.

### RLST 190 Exploring the Good Life (1)

What is a good life? How can we live it in the present and discern how to live it in the future? This course will explore those questions through the theological concept of vocation—the idea of a holistic, evolving calling in life that connects us to the world beyond ourselves. We'll learn from readings and speakers from different perspectives, group discussion, spiritual practices, and tools from career counseling as we explore how to build lives of meaning and purpose. The course will draw on insights from religious traditions, especially Christian theology, but warmly welcomes members of all worldviews.

### RLST 191 The Greco-Roman World and Christian Origins (3)

This course functions together with a study program in Greece. Students will also meet for nine hours of classroom instruction and orientation before departure to Greece. The remainder of the course will occur while traveling to and within Greece. Students will study the origins of early Christianity in Greece during the first century C.E. in light of Greco-Roman culture and history. Students will examine ways in which ancient cultural patterns, symbols, values, and embodied artifacts of the Greco-Roman world shaped early Christianity in Greece and that movement's unique Christian assemblies by investigating Greco-Roman religions, politics, gender issues, social status, daily life, city planning, architecture, art, economy, and ancient travel. The course is organized around daily excursions to various archaeological sites in Greece that will allow students to probe the cultural and historical realities of Greco-Roman antiquity and their influence on early Christianity.

### RLST 213 Experiencing God (3)

An exploration of the ways people come to know the divine through their own experience. This course will focus on works in which people reflect on their experience of the divine, and it will also consider works in which scholars seek to understand religious experience from different perspectives. Prerequisite: Completion of Sophia Religious Traditions I requirement.

**RLST 214 Spirituality and Comedy (3)**

Christianity has often been resistant to areas of life that are associated with comedy, such as laughter, play, and joy. Theologian Hugo Rahner summarizes the traditional objections: "May a Christian laugh, when he has heard our Lord's warning, 'Woe upon you who laugh now; you shall mourn and weep' (Luke 6.25)? May a Christian go on merrily playing when a stern and strict choice has to be made for eternity?" This course will investigate the relationship between comic dimensions of human life and Christian spirituality, in particular by asking how attending to comedy might contribute to the study of spirituality. Since spirituality requires self-reflection, a significant part of the class will involve participating in spiritual practices, as well as two experiential events outside of class. The course will also explore how contemporary Christian spirituality is shaped by engagement with other religious traditions. Prerequisite: Completion of Sophia Religious Traditions I requirement.

**RLST 225 Reading the Hebrew Bible in Jewish & Christian Terms (3)**

This course is a study of the Bible as a foundation for Jewish and Christian theology and the relationship between the two faith traditions. It will focus on the Hebrew Bible and how some of its texts and themes are utilized and reinterpreted in the New Testament. Prerequisite: Completion of Sophia Religious Traditions I requirement.

**RLST 228 Christian Holiness in History and Culture (3)**

This course examines a broad array of Christian practices, techniques and ideas about holiness. Prerequisite: Completion of Sophia Religious Traditions I requirement.

**RLST 232 Introduction to the New Testament (3)**

This course examines the Christian biblical writings giving attention to their social-historical, literary, and theological characteristics. The New Testament texts are situated within the respective Jewish Palestinian and Greco-Roman contexts of Jesus and his early followers. Attention is given to compositional issues and to the subsequent transmission of these writings. Prerequisite: Completion of Sophia Religious Traditions I requirement.

**RLST 236 Faith in Action (3)**

This course examines the faith, practices, and theories of influential American Christian activists who exemplify a variety of approaches to the Christian quest for justice. It seeks to understand how a commitment to justice can grow out of Christian faith. Prerequisite: Completion of Sophia Religious Traditions I requirement.

**RLST 240 Catholic Social Thought (3)**

What is the Church's proper role in social and political life? What insight does the Roman Catholic tradition offer in the face of ever more difficult moral quandaries? This course examines the foundational elements of the Church's social tradition and their application to contemporary issues such as poverty and homelessness, health care, the environment, capital punishment, war, and the beginning and end of life, and may focus on the impact of such issues on women inside and outside the Church, as well as on the relationship between one's role as believer and one's role as citizen. Prerequisite: Completion of Sophia Religious Traditions I requirement.

**RLST 251 The Christian Tradition (3)**

An examination of the sources and development of Christianity's central teachings. Consideration of the history and contemporary understandings of those aspects of the faith of prime importance: God, Christ, the Church, the Christian life. What does it mean to be part of the Christian tradition? How can we understand its richness and diversity? Prerequisite: Completion of Sophia Religious Traditions I requirement.

**RLST 261 Catholic Faith and Life (3)**

A study of basic doctrinal beliefs, moral values, and worship in the Catholic Church. Primarily an introduction to a theological understanding of these issues, the course also considers practical implications for personal and social life. Prerequisite: completed Religious Traditions I Sophia requirement.

**RLST 262 Queer Theology (1.5)**

This course will introduce students to the field of queer theology. After familiarizing students with academic approaches to Christian theology and the history and central ideas of queer theory, we will undertake an in-depth study of queer theological approaches to (1) Scripture, (2) theological anthropology, (3) Christology, (4) Mariology, and (5) spirituality. In addition to learning about and analyzing queer theological texts, we will also hone our abilities to generate and debate our own original theological arguments. The course will meet once-a-week for 75 minutes and will run across both semesters of the academic year. The work of each semester will amount to 1.5 credits. Students are encouraged but not required to enroll in both semesters of the course for a total of 3 credit hours. Though this is a course in Christian theology, students need not belong to the Christian faith, nor any faith tradition at all, to participate. Likewise, students need not have any familiarity with queer studies. Students from the tri-campus community of all gender and sexual identities are welcome in this course.

**RLST 263 Queer Theology II (1.5)**

This course will introduce students to the field of queer theology. After familiarizing students with academic approaches to Christian theology and the history and central ideas of queer theory, we will undertake an in-depth study of queer theological approaches to (1) Scripture, (2) theological anthropology, (3) Christology, (4) Mariology, and (5) spirituality. In addition to learning about and analyzing queer theological texts, we will also hone our abilities to generate and debate our own original theological arguments. The course will meet once-a-week for 75 minutes and will run across both semesters of the academic year. The work of each semester will amount to 1.5 credits. Students are encouraged but not required to enroll in both semesters of the course for a total of 3 credit hours. Though this is a course in Christian theology, students need not belong to the Christian faith, nor any faith tradition at all, to participate. Likewise, students need not have any familiarity with queer studies. Students from the tri-campus community of all gender and sexual identities are welcome in this course.

**RLST 290 Special Topics (1-3)**

The presentation of selected general education topics not covered in regular departmental 200 level courses. May be repeated for credit with a different topic. Prerequisite: completed Religious Traditions I Sophia requirement.

**RLST 304 Historical Jesus: The Quest for Jesus of Nazareth (3)**

This course will examine the life, message, and mission of the historical Jesus of Nazareth. Students will study the historical context in which Jesus lived, investigate the ancient sources which provide the data for reconstructing the life of the historical Jesus, and make use of historical-critical scholarly methods. Prerequisite: must have already satisfied their Religious Traditions I and II Sophia requirements.

**RLST 307 Leviticus and Numbers: Cultural Interpretations (3)**

This course is a study of the third and fourth books in the Torah or Pentateuch. These biblical books will be read in conversation with biblical criticism and cultural anthropology. Prerequisite: must have already satisfied their Religious Traditions I and II Sophia requirements.

**RLST 308 Paul and His Times (3)**

This course introduces students to the life, letters, and beliefs of Paul's own writings within their social-historical contexts. Students also become familiar with diverse positions in Pauline studies by reading contemporary scholarship. Prerequisite: must have already satisfied their Religious Traditions I and II Sophia requirements.

**RLST 312 Theologies of Love (3)**

A study of various theological approaches to the concept and lived reality of love and loving—God, human persons, and the world of nature and culture. Different sorts of human love are explored: the love of friendship, married love, parental and filial love, love of one's work, etc. Excerpts are read from classical and contemporary theologians, a few mystics, and some current social activists. Prerequisite: must have already satisfied their Religious Traditions I and II Sophia requirements.

**RLST 314 Reading and Interpreting Hebrew Bible Prophets (3)**

This course is a study of the fifteen prophetic books of the Hebrew Bible, written from the 8th century BCE to approximately the 4th century BCE. The books will be read in conversation with contemporary work on methods of biblical interpretation, particularly feminist criticism. Prerequisite: must have already satisfied their Religious Traditions I and II Sophia requirements.

**RLST 315 Free and Responsible: Grace and the Human Condition (3)**

This course explores the God-human relationship which the Christian tradition describes as grace. It studies contemporary expressions of God's action, human freedom, and responsibility. It also explores classical texts and Church teaching on the relationship of grace to sin, salvation, and the meaning of history. Prerequisite: must have already satisfied their Religious Traditions I and II Sophia requirements.

**RLST 318 Heaven and Hell (3)**

This course offers an interdisciplinary introduction to eschatology, the branch of Christian theology that deals with what are traditionally known as the last things—death, judgement, heaven, and hell. The class will focus on the ways theologians and artists have wrestled with understanding and depicting the afterlife. Prerequisite: must have already satisfied their Religious Traditions I and II Sophia requirements.

**RLST 321 The Mystics (3)**

This course explores the wisdom of the Christian mystics and the significance of this wisdom for theology and religious studies. Different themes occur in various semesters, e.g., women mystics, medieval mystics, Spanish mystics, etc. Prerequisite: must have already satisfied their Religious Traditions I and II Sophia requirements.

**RLST 325 Great Theologians (3)**

In a given semester, the work of a few Christian theologians is studied according to selected themes in their writings. Choice of the specific theologians is determined according to the expertise of available faculty and expressed interest of majors. Seminar format. Prerequisite: must have already satisfied their Religious Traditions I and II Sophia requirements.

**RLST 338 Studies in Theology and Film (1)**

This course focuses on selected theological themes in films. Students learn to think critically, discover and discuss theological themes in a variety of cinematic presentations. May be repeated for credit with a different theme. Graded: S/U. This course does not count toward the major or minor. Prerequisite: must have already satisfied their Religious Traditions I and II Sophia requirements.

**RLST 339 Religion and Literature (3)**

This interdisciplinary seminar examines how literature can address religion's questions—and how it can't. Participants will use the lens of literary studies to probe religious texts and will consider how imaginative literature—sacred and secular, Christian and non-Christian—can shed light on theological issues. Prerequisite: must have already satisfied their Religious Traditions I and II Sophia requirements.

**RLST 341 How to Become a Saint (3)**

Who is a saint? What theological, political, and social factors determine who is recognized as a saint in the Catholic tradition? What social and moral imperatives do the saints model for Catholics and other Christians? This class will usher students into historical and theological debates about these questions. After an introduction to Catholic theological perspectives on holiness and sainthood, students will engage the work of contemporary Catholic theologians to explore the relationship of sainthood to sexism, heteronormativity, racism, and mental health stigma in the Catholic Church. Prerequisites Religious Traditions 1 & 2.

**RLST 342 Does God Care When Women Suffer? (3)**

Attentive to the disproportionate suffering that women endure in a patriarchal world, feminist theologians have queried how God responds to unjust suffering: Does God care when women suffer? If so, what is the nature of God's concern for and response to this suffering? How theologians answer these questions has ethical implications for those who uphold God as the model for humanity's own right relationship to suffering. Through engagements with contemporary feminist, womanist, Latina feminist, and ecofeminist theologians from the Christian tradition, students will examine and debate who God is, how God relates to suffering, and how God calls humankind to respond to the struggles of our world.

**RLST 343 Theologies of Mental Health (3)**

Mental health struggles—in our own lives or the lives of those around us—frequently engender difficult questions: What is happening? Why is this happening? And what should we do when faced with these struggles? Sufferers and those who accompany them sometimes turn to faith communities for answers, and though some find solace in the theological and practical responses they receive, many are left searching. This course will initiate students into the academic Christian theological discussions that have arisen in response to these questions. Prerequisites: Completion of Religious Traditions I and II

**RLST 351 Religion and Science (3)**

This course explores the relationship between religion and science, and addresses questions raised by the religion/science debate and seeks ways to relate better the wisdom gained by science and religion. Prerequisite: must have already satisfied their Religious Traditions I and II Sophia requirements.

**RLST 352 Religion and Politics (3)**

This course examines ethical issues at the intersection of religion and politics. It explores topics such as the function and limits of secular authority for religious communities, the possible imperative for religious claims to enter the public sphere, and how various competing religious claims may be adjudicated effectively. Prerequisite: Junior/Senior standing or permission of instructor. Prerequisite: must have already satisfied their Religious Traditions I and II Sophia requirements.

**RLST 355 African-American Theologies (3)**

This course will be an engagement with various forms of African-American theologies. Our focus will be on ways in which African-Americans have conceived of the three persons of the Christian Trinity, both constructively and critically. We will also consider ways in which social, historical, cultural, and political contexts relate to developing theologies. Prerequisite: must have already satisfied their Religious Traditions I and II Sophia requirements.

**RLST 362 Becoming Women (3)**

This course examines Christian theological positions about women and sexuality as these positions have functioned in history and have affected Church teaching on the role of women in society. It uses interdisciplinary, interfaith discussions to highlight the importance of constructive theological reflection on contemporary issues facing women. Prerequisite: must have already satisfied their Religious Traditions I and II Sophia requirements.

**RLST 370 Aquinas' Search for God: Faith Meets Philosophy (3)**

This course, based in the writings of Saint Thomas Aquinas, pursues the mysteries of faith with the fascination of reason. Topics to be addressed include the existence and attributes of God, God's relationship to the world's evil, and the delicate balance between faith and reason. Prerequisite: must have already satisfied their Religious Traditions I and II Sophia requirements.

**RLST 380 Interfaith Studies (3)**

What do non-Christian religions say about ultimate reality and the meaning of life? How should Christians regard the beliefs and practices of non-Christians? A survey of selected non-Christian theologies and Christian responses. Prerequisite: must have already satisfied their Religious Traditions I and II Sophia requirements.

**RLST 381 Islam: Beliefs, Practices, and Current Events (3)**

This course will be an engagement with Islam. We will examine Muslim beliefs and practices, as well as ways that Islam impacts current events. We will explore the roots of the Muslim tradition, different ways of being Muslim, the status of women in Islam, and the relationship between violence and Islam, among other topics. We will also consider ways in which the social, historical, cultural, and political contexts relate to Islam. Prerequisite: must have already satisfied their Religious Traditions I and II Sophia requirements.

**RLST 390 Special Topics (1-3)**

The presentation of selected subjects of special relevance not included in regular department offerings. May be repeated with different topic. Prerequisite: must have already satisfied their Religious Traditions I and II Sophia requirements.

**RLST 406 Ways of Doing Theology (3)**

Reflection on the methods and standards used by Christian thinkers to develop appropriate and credible theologies when faced with the most pressing issues in contemporary Christian life. Prerequisite: must have already satisfied their Religious Traditions I and II Sophia requirements.

**RLST 445 Historical Theology (3)**

This course is an exercise in Historical Theology that identifies classical theologians and classical texts from the Christian tradition—especially from the early Church, the Middle Ages, and the Reformation. This course explores selected classical texts, in context, as a way of understanding the evolution of Christian doctrine and as a way of informing the work of theology. Prerequisite: must have already satisfied their Religious Traditions I and II Sophia requirements.

**RLST 457 Systematic Theology Seminar (3)**

A study of systematics, correlating major theological themes, and doctrinal issues such as Christology, ecclesiology, sin and grace, sacraments. Prerequisite: must have already satisfied their Religious Traditions I and II Sophia requirements.

**RLST 458 Theological Ethics Seminar (3)**

A study of basic issues for Christian ethical reflection, such as the status of norms, the meaning of natural law, doctrine of person and human action, and the nature of moral argument. Prerequisite: must have already satisfied their Religious Traditions I and II Sophia requirements.

**RLST 476 Theology for Ministry and Life I: Theory (3)**

A study of issues, foundations, and theologies which shape contemporary catechetical ministries. Special attention to the psychology of religious learning and to themes in biblical, moral, and doctrinal theology which characterize contemporary Catholic thinking. Prerequisite: must have already satisfied their Religious Traditions I and II Sophia requirements.

**RLST 486 Theology for Ministry and Life II: Practicum (1-3)**

Supervised ministry or teaching of religion in a local parish or school is the basis for a weekly reflection seminar and for readings. This practicum does not count as one of the two required electives for the RLST major or minor. Prerequisite: RLST 476 and must have already satisfied their Religious Traditions I and II Sophia requirements.

**RLST 497 Independent Study (1-3)**

May be repeated.

**RLST 499 Internship (1-3)**

Internship opportunities. May be repeated.

## Religious Studies and Theology

This is a suggested model for students interested in the RLST major. For individualized advising information, please contact Stacy Davis, department chair (sdavis@saintmarys.edu).

Students planning to study abroad should be sure to complete their RTI and RTII courses in their first year, so that they can take an upper-level RLST course abroad.

The department typically offers 2-3 major courses per year. This means practically that if a student has not started taking courses by the spring of their sophomore year, the department cannot guarantee that the student will graduate on time without independent studies, which are taught at the discretion of the faculty.

Course	Title	Credits
<b>First Year</b>		
<b>First Semester</b>		
Sophia Language I		
CTS or W <sup>1</sup>		
SPLL 101		
RLST 101	Introducing Religious Studies	3
Sophia		
Elective		
<b>Credits</b>		<b>3</b>
<b>Second Semester</b>		
Sophia Language II		
CTS or W <sup>2</sup>		
RLST 2XX (LO1: RTII) <sup>3</sup>		3

Sophia	
Sophia	
<b>Credits</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Second Year</b>	
<b>First Semester</b>	
RLST Major Course <sup>4</sup>	3
Sophia	
<b>Credits</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Second Semester</b>	
Sophia	
Sophia	
RLST Major Course <sup>5</sup>	3
<b>Credits</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Third Year</b>	
<b>First Semester</b>	
Sophia	
RLST Major Course	3
<b>Credits</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Second Semester</b>	
Sophia	
RLST Major Course	3
<b>Credits</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Fourth Year</b>	
<b>First Semester</b>	
RLST Major Course	3
RLST 497    Independent Study <sup>6</sup>	3
<b>Credits</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Second Semester</b>	
RLST Major Course	3
<b>Credits</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Total Credits</b>	<b>27</b>

<sup>1</sup> RLST 101W (Houck – LO2: Women’s Voices & LO3: Intercultural Competence) is a possibility here, along with RLST 101 CTS (Houck – LO3: Intercultural Competence; Gower – LO2: Women’s Voices).

<sup>2</sup> RLST 101W (Houck – LO2: Women’s Voices & LO3: Intercultural Competence) is a possibility here, along with RLST 101 CTS (Houck – LO3: Intercultural Competence; Gower – LO2: Women’s Voices).

<sup>3</sup> Almost all RTII courses have additional certifications. They are as follows: RLST 214: LO3: Intercultural Competence; RLST 225: LO3: Intercultural Competence and Social Responsibility; RLST 236: LO3: Academic Experiential Learning and Social Responsibility; RLST 251: LO2: Women’s Voices; RLST 261: LO3: Social Responsibility.

<sup>4</sup> For students studying abroad in the fall, the recommendation is that they take a seminar there.

<sup>5</sup> For students studying abroad in the spring, the recommendation is that they take a seminar there.

<sup>6</sup> This course is for students who will be writing a research paper for their senior comprehensive. **Students who choose the exam option will need an additional course to graduate and should notify the department chair by the spring of their junior year.**