

Religion Academic Learning Compact

The religion program at New College aims to encourage critical thinking about religious ideals and practices in history; to develop empathetic insight into the fundamental ideas and values of other peoples, times, and places which are key to any effective communication with those outside one's own culture and time; and to foster critical self-consciousness about the values and commitments of one's own age and society and thus learn about the historically developed content of one's own culture as well as that of others. In light of the pivotal role religion has played in shaping selves, societies, and cultures from ancient times to the present, the program provides the beginning student with an understanding of the complexity of religious phenomena and offers the advanced student a variety of methods appropriate to such study.

Prospective majors in religion should consult with faculty to construct an individualized plan of study. Typically this plan will include: an introduction to the study of religion to engage the central ideas of the discipline; work in a variety of approaches to the study of religion, including conceptual approaches to the study of religion, religion in society and ethics; expansion of content knowledge including exploration of the sacred scriptures of a religious tradition; coverage of the history and development of a particular religious tradition; and study in a tradition distinctly different from one's major focus. Interdisciplinary majors, or senior projects linking religion to other areas of inquiry, are particularly encouraged.

Through a combination of introductory courses, advanced seminars, and courses offered in cooperation with other disciplines, the Religion program works towards the goals of nurturing critical thinking, effective communication skills, and content knowledge. For advanced students, the present faculty in religion offers intensive work in philosophical issues in religious thought, method in the study of religion, religious texts, and religious ethics. Strong attention is given to historical study, analysis of the relationship between religion and society, and in-depth study of key thinkers and traditional problems in religion. Faculty in allied fields and visiting faculty provide additional opportunities to pursue diverse traditions and approaches.

During the first module of a student's fifth academic semester, the student will consult with a member of the faculty in Religion to determine what work in the concentration has been done and what remains. This meeting will emphasize the student's skills at communicating the coherence of the student's program of study. With the agreement of a second faculty member in Religion to the proposed plan of study, the student will submit an Area of Concentration form in Religion. In the sixth academic semester, the student must present a thesis proposal to the faculty in Religion once again fostering the student's ability to communicate the coherence of the chosen topic. This proposal may serve as the basis for an oral examination by the faculty to determine the viability of the project. With the approval of the thesis committee, the student will submit the Thesis Prospectus and write a thesis under the direction of one of the faculty in Religion. The thesis project and baccalaureate exam will further develop the student's critical thinking skills, communication skills, and display the specific content knowledge germane to the chosen topic.

To validate our internal assessment procedures, the religion discipline will request the college to invite a panel of external assessors to evaluate the program every five years.