

**FACULTY AGENDA ITEM 18-10**

Date: 03/05/18

Submitted by: Laura Stephenson, CAS Dean, ext 1561

SUBJECT: *BACHELOR OF ARTS IN RELIGIOUS STUDIES*

*CHANGE*

Description: The proposed required courses focus on learning theories and methods associated with religious studies, while the additional courses allow students the flexibility to specialize in areas of their choosing, areas in which they will ultimately have to produce a senior thesis. RG 101 introduces students to religious studies as an academic discipline, inviting both engagement with and reflection upon constitutive terminology and the interpretation/explanation dilemma (as above).

RG 102 exposes students to a wide range of data in the field. PH 201 and 202 are included as a foundation for RG 331, in which students will read a wide range of contemporary theorists of religion and begin to position themselves within the field. Elective coursework within the major can be interdisciplinary and allow the student to specialize. In the senior thesis, the student selects one or more theoretical approaches to religion as an analytical prism for their area of focus.

Rationale: The proposed changes to the religious studies major reflect changes within the Department of Philosophy and within the discipline of religious studies and the academy more generally. The Department has historically had only one professor of religious studies. The previous incumbent, Barry Crawford, retired after the 2016-2017 academic year, and the new program administrator, Chris Jones, believes that the program needs to be updated in line with the contemporary discipline of religious studies and with student expectations for humanities majors.

To start with the latter point, the program at present is too large-55 credit hours, nearly all of it required coursework. At a public university without a religious affiliation, very few students are interested in majoring in religious studies by itself. At present, there are only five active majors, and no one has graduated with a BA in religious studies from Washburn University since 2012. In order to grow the major and thereby fill upper division religious studies courses, we need to be able to attract students who are interested in double majoring. Consequently, we have proposed reducing the major's footprint to 33 credit hours and building more flexibility in terms of the courses students can take. This number (33 credit hours) is the same number that is required of our approved Philosophy BA anyway. At the same time, we have not sacrificed competency within the discipline of religious studies because we have brought more focus to the major.

The major, as it previously existed, included required coursework in anthropology, sociology, history, and ethics-fields that may enhance work in religious studies but are in no way intrinsic to it. Religious studies in the 21st century is an academic discipline in its own right, with its own distinct theories and methodologies. It has been characterized most especially of late by serious

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reflection on whether Western bias is innate in its constitutive terminology (e.g., "religion," "ritual," "sacred") and whether scholars should adopt a humanistic/philological/interpretive framework or a social scientific/explanatory framework. The new program focuses on preparing students in these areas.

Financial Implications:

None Proposed Effective

Date: Fall 2018

Request for Action: *Approval from Faculty Senate*

Approved by: AAC on 3/12/2018

Approved by FS on March 26, 2018,

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Attachments Yes