

Philosophy & Religion Program

Purpose Statement

The Philosophy and Religion department offers courses designed to help students critically reflect upon religious and philosophical traditions that for millennia have deeply shaped how human beings have understood their lives as a whole in relationship to all that exists. In so doing, students will critically consider their own worldview, while at the same time understanding more deeply and with greater empathy the worldviews of others. Travel courses offered through the program superbly complement the rest of the curriculum for this purpose. The practical benefits of the major are many. It provides excellent background for professions such as business, education, social work, and humanitarian assistance – to name just a few – that require understanding and empathy across widely diverse cultures. The major develops critical thinking skills essential to success in these and other professions, especially law. The major is one of the two recommended at McPherson College for the pre-law student. In addition, given the possibility the major offers for focusing specifically on the Christian tradition, it can assist students who seek to understand their chosen profession, whatever it may be, as Christian ministry, or who want preparation for entering seminary upon graduation. Whatever their career path, students will find their study of philosophy and religion empowering them to live with a deeper sense of purpose, a surer sense of their vocation, and greater appreciation for values such as peacemaking, stewardship, and service that contribute to the well-being of the world.

The Department of Philosophy and Religion achieves its purpose when its graduates:

- demonstrate an understanding of the world's major religious traditions and the diverse ways each is interpreted, with a special emphasis on how these traditions help shape both the human experience of the world around us and our response to it;
- demonstrate the ability to critically engage the western philosophical tradition as it addresses fundamental questions about the nature of reality, the meaning of our experience, and the purpose of life;
- demonstrate the ability to critically evaluate and improve their own thinking;
- demonstrate the ability to bring the study of religion and philosophy to bear on their quest to understand the meaning and purpose of their own lives.

Philosophy/Religion Major

Requirements (All courses are 3 hours unless otherwise specified)

Core Courses (18 hours):

G-PR 106L Spiritual Pathways: Transformation, Compassion, and Vocation

G-PR 107 Critical Thinking

G-PR 201 Introduction to Philosophy

G-PR 306 World Religions

PR 375 Junior Seminar (1 hour)

PR 431 Topics in Religious or Theological Studies OR

PR 432 Topics in Philosophy

PR 475 Senior Seminar/Thesis (2 hours)

Electives (12 hours from the following):

G-PR 101 Old Testament-Hebrew Bible: God and People in Ancient Israel

G-PR 102 Jesus: New Testament Foundations

G-PR 104 or G-PR 104L Ethics (3 hours if G-PR 104; 4 hours if G-PR 104L)

G-PR 202 Christian Traditions

G-PR 203 Science and Religion

G-PR 204 Peacemaking: Religious Perspectives

G-PR 206 Religion and Environmental Stewardship

PR 303 Readings in Theology/Philosophy (2 or 3 hours, depending on the semester)

G-PR 304 The Church of the Brethren and Beyond: The Christian Church Serves Our World

PR411 Travel (3 or 4 hours, depending on the semester)

Supporting Courses (12 hours from the following)*:

G-ET 201 Social Entrepreneurship

EN 230 Linguistics (2 hours)

G-CM 130 Interpersonal Communication

G-CM 221 Intercultural Communication

CM 240 Gender Communication

CM 325 Conflict Communication

BI 404 Biomedical Ethics (2 hours)

NS 404 Environmental Ethics (2 hours)

G-HI/PS 101 Historical Introduction to Politics
G-PS 215 Global Peace Studies
HI 313 Medieval Europe
PY/SO 210 Human Sexuality
PY/SO 308 Counseling
PY 405 Personality Theories

*Note: alternative courses will be considered and can be approved by the department chair on a case-by-case basis.

Philosophy/Religion Minor

Requirements (all courses are 3 hours)

G-PR 106L Spiritual Pathways: Transformation, Compassion, and Vocation
G-PR 201 Introduction to Philosophy
plus a minimum of 12 more hours of any courses with a PR prefix.

Peace Studies Minor

The Department also coordinates and provides oversight for a minor in Peace Studies. Peace Studies is an interdisciplinary field of study that seeks understanding of the causes of human conflict and violence. It then strives to develop methods for resolving conflicts nonviolently and for promoting peace through justice at all levels of human society and in human relationships with the natural environment. The minor can complement any number of majors, for example, Political Science, History, or Environmental Stewardship, especially for those students seeking to couple their major field and professional training to values of social justice and peacemaking.

Students who complete a minor in Peace Studies will be able to:

- demonstrate that they understand some of the most important causes and consequences of interpersonal, societal, and international conflict and violence; and
- demonstrate that they understand a variety of methods for conflict resolution and peacemaking that address these causes and promote the well-being of human communities and of the planet on which we live.

Requirements (all courses are 3 hours unless otherwise specified)

Core Courses (12 hours)

G-PS 125 International Relations
G-PR 204 Peacemaking: Religious Perspectives
G-PS 215 Global Peace Studies
CM 325 Conflict Communication

Electives (at least 6 hours from the following)

G-PR 104 Ethics
G-NS 141 Environmental Science (4 hours)
G-ET 201 Social Entrepreneurship
G-SO 202 Minorities in the US (3-4 hours)
G-PR 206 Religion and Environmental Stewardship
SO 206 Social Problems (3-4 hours)
G-CM 221 Intercultural Communication
CM 240 Gender Communication
NS 404 Environmental Ethics (2 hours)

Philosophy & Religion Course Descriptions

G-PR 101 Old Testament-Hebrew Bible: God and People in Ancient Israel

3 hours

An exploration of the history, literature, and religion of ancient Israel using selected portions of the Hebrew Bible (Old Testament) as primary

sources. The course focuses on major themes that have shaped the life and faith of both Jewish and Christian religious communities to this day, and will provide students opportunities to consider how these themes might inform their thinking about their own lives. (Fall)

G-PR 102 Jesus: New Testament Foundations

3 hours

An introduction to the New Testament that focuses on understanding the life and teachings of Jesus in his first-century context. The course will also explore how these foundational texts continue to inform Christian life and faith, and will provide students opportunities to ponder the potential impact of these reflections on their own lives. (Fall)

G-PR 104 or *G-PR 104L Ethics

3 hours (not Language Intensive) or 4 hours (Language Intensive)

This course enables students to think critically about moral values and the process of ethical decision-making. Students will be challenged, both to understand how and why others think about the moral life as they do, and to evaluate critically their own moral values and the ways they resolve ethical problems. (Fall, Interterm, and Spring)

***G-PR 106L Spiritual Pathways: Transformation, Compassion, and Vocation**

3 hours (Language Intensive)

An introduction to religion that considers (1) how different religious traditions understand life as a journey in search of spiritual awakening and transformation and (2) how these different traditions in turn see compassion for others and devotion to service as two keys to living an authentic human life. In view of the preceding, the course culminates with a reflection on the meaning of personal vocation and offers students an opportunity to consider their own individual life callings. (Fall)

G-PR 107 Critical Thinking

3 hours

This course will help students understand how we draw conclusions about what is true in any and all aspects of life. The goal of the course is for students to develop their skill at evaluating the quality of their thinking, especially by becoming aware of common ways in which our reasoning goes wrong. The course will encourage students to consider both how critical thinking can become a way of life, and the positive impact that critical thinking can have on our world. (Spring)

G-PR 201 Introduction to Philosophy

3 hours

This course will introduce students to the activity of philosophy. In dialogue with the Western philosophical tradition, students will practice systematic, critical, and deep reflection on some of the most fundamental questions that can be asked, for example, What can we know, and how? What does it mean to be human? Does life have ultimate meaning, and what might that meaning be? Students will be introduced to the concept of a "life philosophy" and provided the opportunity to develop their own personal philosophies of life. (Fall, and Interterm even years)

G-PR 202 Christian Traditions

3 hours

An exploration of different, contemporary traditions of Christian faith and practice that will help students grasp some of the diverse ways that Christians today understand the meaning of following Jesus. The course will consider important texts from these diverse traditions, as well as biographies of some of their key representatives, and then ponder their significance for Christians and non-Christians alike who seek to live lives of meaning and purpose. (Spring)

G-PR 203 Science and Religion

3 hours

Especially in the United States, science and religion are typically presupposed to be in conflict with each other. This course starts from a different presupposition. It begins by exploring in some detail the story of the universe told by contemporary cosmology and evolutionary biology, and in the process invites students to consider how a dialogue between science and faith might lead to a rich, coherent, and personally meaningful understanding of humanity and of humanity's place in the universe. (Spring)

G-PR 204 Peacemaking: Religious Perspectives

3 hours

This course critically engages diverse religious perspectives on peacemaking. It begins by exploring the various positions on non-resistance, non-violence, and humanitarian service taken by the historic peace churches: Mennonite, Quaker, and Brethren. It then seeks precedents for these positions in Christianity's past, and finally moves forward into the present, with special attention to conversations within and between different world religions about the religious roots of violence, and about the vital contribution that religious believers and communities can make to world peace. (Spring, odd years)

G-PR 206 Religion and Environmental Stewardship

3 hours

Beginning with Christianity and then exploring the perspectives of other religions, western and eastern, this course explores how religious belief and practice impact human attitudes toward the natural world, shaping in turn both how environmental problems are perceived, and the steps that are, or are not, taken to address these problems, such as global climate change, preserving biological diversity, and the consequences of environmental degradation for the poor. Throughout, students will be given opportunities to evaluate critically their own sense of vocation to environmental stewardship. (Spring, even years)

G-PR 302 Politics and Religion

3 hours

This course considers how religion and politics have influenced each other in the United States, as well as the ways that Americans have understood those influences. Topics include the interplay between church and state, the politics of sexuality, gender, and race, and the relation between religion and democracy.

PR 303 Readings in Theology/Philosophy

2-3 hours

In recent years, this course has been designed around the topic of thanatology: examining origin of death cultural mythologies, psychological stages of dying, interpretations of near death experiences, organ-tissue donations, world funeral practices, and beliefs of life after death in the world's major faiths. However, the course may cover other topics as well.

G-PR 304 The Church of the Brethren and Beyond: The Christian Church Serves Our World

3 hours

With special emphasis on the Church of the Brethren, a study of how Christian churches are helping to serve others and bring peace amidst the many cultural, racial, and political struggles of our day.

G-PR 306 World Religions

3 hours

An introduction to major world religions, including, but not limited to: Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism, Taoism, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. The goal is for students to understand key teachings and practices of each, and thereby to develop an understanding of and empathy for how adherents of these traditions experience life and the world around them. Finally, student will consider how their study of these traditions might contribute to their own life and thought.

PR 375 Junior Seminar

1 hour

Philosophy and Religion majors during their junior year are required to meet together to critically reflect on the idea of vocation from a variety of religious and philosophical perspectives, and then both to research a profession they are considering and to reflect on how pursuing that profession might answer to their developing sense of vocation.

PR 411 Travel

3-4 hours (Can be repeated)

Students from all majors have the unique opportunity to experience firsthand the religions and philosophies of different cultures and environments through international or domestic travel. (Interterm)

PR 431 Topics in Religious and Theological Studies

3 hours

An in-depth study of a particular religion or topic in religious studies, or of a particular person or topic in Christian history or theology. Emphasis will be placed on critically reading key texts and understanding religious or theological subjects in their appropriate contexts, and then engaging them from the perspectives of students' own interests and life philosophies. Topics will vary from year to year. For example, the course might study Islam or Buddhism, or topics like religious ritual or religious art and architecture. Or it might focus on a figure such as Augustine or Thomas Merton, or on topics like Christian worship or problems in Christian ethics. (Fall, even years)

PR 432 Topics in Philosophy

3 hours

A study of a specific field within philosophy that will introduce its important questions and help students understand and evaluate critically the different answers that philosophers have proposed. The emphasis throughout will be on practicing the methods of philosophical reflection and debate. Topics will vary year to year, for example, philosophy of law, philosophy of science, philosophy of mind, philosophy of religion, or aesthetics (philosophy of art). (Fall, odd years)

PR 475 Senior Seminar/Thesis

2 hours

Senior Philosophy and Religion majors are required to do a senior thesis with the topic approved by their departmental advisor no later than midterm of the fall semester. Students may enroll for the course fall, interterm, or spring during their senior year, but are expected to work on their project throughout the year in consultation with their departmental advisor, and to meet periodically with other Philosophy and Religion seniors as they do so.

Special Course Options

295/495 Field Experience (1-4 hours)

297 Study Abroad (12-16 hours)

299/499 Independent Study (1-4 hours)

388 Career Connections (3-10 hours)

445 Readings and Research (1-4 hours)