

Course Specification

Courses in this area will lead students to explore the relation of faith to reason from a variety of disciplinary and thematic approaches. Such courses will be largely epistemological in their focus and will pursue questions concerning the cohesiveness and/or points of tension between faith and reason, as the latter are conceived by particular theories or traditions. Students will be provided with appropriate intellectual frameworks that will enable them to critically analyze and evaluate problems inherent to such topics as the rational justification of religious beliefs; the nature of faith as a distinct epistemic attitude; the coherence of a religious belief system; the compatibility of religious belief with science; the problem of evil or of human suffering; religious relativism as a response to religious diversity and religious tolerance; and the relation of personal religious beliefs to public rational discourse and democratic institutions. In this way, courses will help prepare students to engage with contemporary debates about religious claims in an intelligent and informed manner and with appropriate critical appreciation for the methodological assumptions made by the participants. In pursuing these aims, Faith and Reason courses will reflect a foundational commitment of the Roman Catholic tradition to open engagement with difficult questions concerning human rationality and religious belief.

Note: Because course offerings in the Faith and Reason area can be offered by scholars in a wide variety of fields, and because interested instructors may approach questions of epistemology, or theory of knowledge, in diverse ways, faculty proposing courses are encouraged to seek out the Chair of the Faith-Reason Committee with any questions that should arise concerning the language or concepts employed in the requirements below.

Course Objectives

- (1) Students will be able to explain at least one set of meanings that have been attributed to terms having to do with faith (e.g., ‘faith,’ ‘religious belief’) and at least one set of meanings that have been attributed to terms having to do with reason or knowledge (e.g., ‘reason,’ ‘rationality,’ ‘knowledge,’ ‘science’).
- (2) Students will be able to identify and explain epistemological issues that arise in cases of religious belief or nonbelief.
- (3) Students will be able to explain a particular theoretical problem regarding the faith-reason relation and to explain and evaluate at least one intellectual theory or tradition that offers a response to that problem.

Note: Although courses are expected to satisfy all three Objectives, different courses may satisfy individual Objectives to different degrees, depending on course content and focus.

Submission Materials

Proposals for Faith and Reason certification should include the following details:

- (1) The general criterion or criteria listed below that the proposed course would fulfill (A, B, C) *and* the specific topic(s) to be treated under that criterion or criteria.

Examples: Criterion (A), empirical evidence for Christianity; Criterion (B), logical coherence of Judaism; Criterion (C), the compatibility of religious belief with the various methods and results of scientific inquiry.

- (2) A detailed explanation of how the proposed course would fulfill the specific criterion or criteria listed in (1).
- (3) A brief articulation of the particular conception(s) of faith, of reason, and of the relation between them that would be pursued in the course.
- (4) An explanation of how the three Course Objectives listed above will be assessed in the course.

The Criteria

(A) The course deals extensively with empirical evidence or rational arguments for and/or against the existence of God, or for and/or against a particular theistic religion (i.e., Christianity, Judaism, or Islam). In cases where empirical evidence is treated, the course includes a sustained and direct discussion of the relevance of the findings to the existence of God or to the truth of a particular theistic religion.

Examples of topics, which if covered in the prescribed way, would qualify:

- Critical discussion of any of the so-called “traditional” arguments for the existence of God, such as those found in Anselm or Thomas Aquinas
- Critical discussion of design arguments with evidence from cosmology or biology
- Critical discussion of the evidence for miracles
- Critical discussion of the evidence for or against the veridicality of various religious experiences as well as the problem of their interpretation
- Critical discussion of rational arguments against the existence of God based on the reality of suffering
- Critical discussion of rational arguments against the truth claims of a particular religion based on the fact of religious diversity
- Critical discussion of arguments for the truth claims of a particular religion based on testimonial evidence (written or oral)

Examples of existing SJU courses that satisfy Criterion (A):

- PHL 354 Philosophy of Religion
- PHL 358 Atheism and the Problem of God
- PHL 359 Existence of God
- PHL 365 Christianity and Evidence
- THE 345 Evil as a Theological Problem
- THE 350 Beauty of God
- THE 369 Does God Exist?

(B) The course deals extensively with the internal logical coherence of theism or of the body of theological doctrines associated with a particular theistic religion (i.e., Christianity, Judaism, or Islam).

Examples of topics, which if covered in the prescribed way, would qualify:

- Critical discussion of the internal coherence of the traditional properties of God and/or of the coherence of these properties with claims about human nature, such as the claim that human beings have free will
- Critical discussion of arguments about the logical consistency of the Trinity
- Critical discussion of whether God's goodness is compatible with theories of salvation and/or damnation

Examples of existing SJU courses that satisfy Criterion (B):

- PHL 350 God in Recent Philosophy
- PHL 355 Philosophical Issues in Christian Doctrine
- THE 341 Jesus Through the Centuries
- THE 346 Theology of Salvation

(C) The course deals extensively with a theoretical, meta-level problem or topic concerning the nature of faith, reason, and the relation between them.

Examples of topics, which if covered in the prescribed way, would qualify:

- Critical discussion of the coherence or complementarity of faith and reason given specific theories or traditions concerning each (e.g., classical Catholic and/or Protestant approaches to the rationality of faith; Soren Kierkegaard's views concerning religious faith and evidence; Immanuel Kant's conception of faith as a rational epistemic attitude distinct from that of knowledge)
- Critical discussion of the compatibility of religious belief with the various methods and/or results of scientific inquiry
- Critical discussion of the nature of knowledge, its various species, and how knowledge claims relate to faith claims

- Critical discussion of normative issues concerning the holding of religious beliefs, such as normative issues raised by pragmatic arguments for the existence of God (e.g., in Pascal, William James)
- Critical discussion of the methods employed in scriptural interpretation (e.g., hermeneutical, archeological, critical-historical) and the relation of their findings to particular religious beliefs, their content, and their justification
- Critical discussion of epistemological dilemmas posed by competing faith claims or claims of religious non-belief
- Critical investigation of the challenges brought to the epistemological presuppositions of modern Roman Catholic and Protestant theologies and their faith claims by the emergence of liberation theologies, including but not limited to feminist theologies, Latin American liberation theologies, and black theologies

Examples of existing SJU courses that satisfy Criterion (C):

- BIO 360 God and Evolution
- HIS 319 Revolutions 1517-1648
- INT 354 Psychology and Religion
- PHL 351 Reason, Faith, and Relativism
- PHL 353 Philosophy, Science, and Religion
- PHL 362 Faith and Reason in the Kantian Philosophy
- REL 343 Reason, Science, and Faith in Islam
- THE 356 Liberation and Political Theologies
- THE 381 Can Only One Religion Be True?