

# **PROPOSAL TO CREATE A PROGRAM IN RELIGIOUS STUDIES WITH SPECIFIC MINORS IN JUDAIC, CHRISTIANITY, AND ISLAMIC STUDIES**

## **Overview**

The existing Concentration in Religious Studies is one of the oldest interdisciplinary enterprises at Oakland University, its origin dating back to at least the early 1970s. The departments of Art History, English, History, Philosophy, Psychology, and Sociology-Anthropology have all made curriculum contributions to the concentration. The approach taken in the study of religion within the concentration has always been scholarly and detached. Religion is recognized as a pervasive human phenomenon that significantly impacts many areas of life. But while our courses explore this impact they do not seek to either validate or invalidate the truth claims of any religious system. Both Western and Eastern religious systems are studied in both their historical and contemporary manifestations. (See Appendix 1 for a detailed summary of specific course offerings and requirements in the concentration.)

Over the past three years, a total of six students have graduated from Oakland with completed concentrations in religious studies. During this same time, an additional six students have graduated with an independent major in religious studies (approvals granted by the College COI). Enrollments across all religious studies courses (including those that are cross-listed) during fall and winter semesters have consistently averaged around seventeen students per course over more than 30 courses offered during the past three years. Spring and summer semester enrollments during this same time have averaged about 13 students over a total of 9 courses. These are modest numbers, but they do indicate a persistent interest in religious topics among a certain segment of Oakland students. Furthermore, enrollments in the core courses of REL 100 (Introduction to Religion) and REL 150 (World Religious Traditions) have increased substantially during the past year since offering them as on-line courses.

Circumstances at this time now seem propitious for expanding and refining the curricular scope of the concentration. More specifically, it is proposed that the concentration be subsumed within a newly designated Program in Religious Studies and that three separate minors also be incorporated into this program: Judaic Studies, Christianity Studies, and Islamic Studies. Students still could choose to satisfy the requirements of a general concentration in religion. But, as an alternate option, through one of the newly proposed minors, they would now also be able to focus their coursework within the scholarly analysis of a particular religious tradition.

## **Pedagogical, Curricular, and Practical Rationale for Development of Religion Minors**

The need for increased understanding of religious influences in the modern world has perhaps never been more apparent than at the present time. Judaism, Islam, and Christianity in particular—with their profoundly intertwined historical, theological, cultural, and ethnic components—are integrally connected to the most urgent global political issues of the late 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> centuries. The proposed new minors will provide students with more coherent and reliable frameworks for sorting out and achieving greater insights into the scope and complexity of these issues.

The Detroit Metropolitan Area is itself incredibly rich in its ethnic and corresponding religious diversity. Yet availability of serious, academically based religious studies programs in this area is surprisingly meager. Outside of Oakland University, Detroit area students interested in

pursuing an academic program at a public university in religious studies must go to the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor or to Michigan State University in East Lansing. By reconfiguring our concentration as a program that includes focal minors, we can potentially increase the attraction of Oakland as a university of choice for such students.

Most students pick majors that they perceive are likely to have some kind of career payoff. A major in religious studies would not strike most students as having such a payoff. Minors, however, often provide students with a way of packaging elective credits to reflect personal interests, even if these don't have perceived career implications. Thus, for example, The Women's Studies Program at Oakland has relatively few majors but many minors. Similarly, a religious studies minor would facilitate that segment of the student population that has personal interests in religion in taking a meaningful set of courses reflecting those interests while still having a more conventional, "practical" major.

Departments contributing to the current concentration already offer a number of courses that could be cross-listed and incorporated into the proposed minors, especially in Christianity and Islam. Additional courses appropriate for these minors could be developed and cross-listed, given the topic interests and research areas of current Oakland faculty members. (See examples under specific minor outline proposals below.) Judaism would pose a greater potential curricular problem, since there are few if any current faculty members at Oakland with requisite expertise to offer Judaic studies courses.

However, a realistic opportunity to receive significant donor contributions is being pursued that would make possible the hiring of at least one fulltime faculty member who would have the necessary expertise to teach appropriate academic courses in Judaic studies and whose appointment would reside in an appropriate department within the College of Arts and Sciences. The donation amount being pursued would also permit hiring occasional special lecturers to offer additional relevant courses as well as provide student scholarships as an important incentive for students to enroll in the minor. Successful negotiation of donor funds is ultimately contingent on having a set of approved religion minors. At the same time, approval of the proposed minors—especially in Judaic studies—is contingent on having available the external funding necessary to support the anticipated cost. Given these reciprocal contingencies, it should be understood that CAS approval of the present proposal would be conditional: Catalog publication (and actual implementation) of the Program in Religious Studies with its newly designated religious minors would be withheld until adequate funding is secured.

### **Curriculum Summaries for Proposed Minors in Judaic, Christianity, and Islamic Studies**

A model for each of the proposed religious studies minors is elaborated below. As noted above, most of the courses given as curricular examples in the proposed Christianity and Islamic minors are either already offered at Oakland in various CAS departments or readily could be developed based on existing faculty expertise and/or interest. Apart from a few special topics courses in Judaism recently offered by an adjunct instructor, none of the courses suggested in the proposed Judaic studies minor are currently catalog-approved at Oakland. Current Oakland faculty members could develop some of these courses, but a satisfactory Judaic studies curriculum would require hiring a full-time faculty member with appropriate expertise in this area.

**ELABORATION OF A JUDAIC STUDIES MINOR  
WITHIN THE PROPOSAL FOR A NEW PROGRAM IN RELIGIOUS STUDIES  
AT OAKLAND UNIVERSITY**

Judaic Studies would be one of several potential minors within a proposed religious studies program. (Minors focusing on the academic study of other religious cultures and traditions would include Islam and Christianity.)

**Specific requirements for a Judaic Studies minor would include the following:**

**Credits**

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|----|---|
| 4  | 1. <i>Either</i> REL 100 (Introduction to Religion) <i>or</i> REL 150 (World Religious Traditions). These courses provide a comparative grounding for understanding Judaism in relation to other major religious systems.   |
| 12 | 2. Students must take 3 courses selected from a list of substantive courses on specific topics related to Judaism. These courses would need to be developed, approved, and offered on a regular basis. Current examples of courses that have already been offered at Oakland under a special topics rubric include <i>Introduction to Judaic Studies</i> , <i>Jewish Mysticism</i> , and <i>The Jewish Jesus</i> . These same courses could continue to be developed and added to the approved curriculum along with additional, appropriate courses. Examples of such courses might include: <i>Jewish Civilization and Culture</i> , <i>The American Jewish Community</i> , <i>The History and Religion of Ancient Israel</i> ,* <i>Hebrew</i> , <i>Introduction to Rabbinic Literature</i> , <i>Anti-Semitism in English Renaissance Drama</i> ,* <i>Modern Jewish Literature</i> , <i>Jewish Folklore</i> , <i>Biblical Archeology</i> ,* <i>The Land of Israel/Palestine Through the Ages</i> , <i>The Holocaust</i> , <i>The Arab-Israeli Conflict</i> ,* and so on. Most of these courses could potentially be cross-listed in relevant academic departments such as History, English, Modern Language, Political Science, and Sociology and Anthropology. |
| 4  | 3. Students may elect <i>one</i> of the following options:<br><br>Internship in Jewish Community Service Project<br><br>An additional Judaic Studies approved course<br><br>Independent Study/Directed Reading within approved Judaic Studies topic area.   |

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20 Total Credits

\* Courses already offered at Oakland or that could readily be developed by current Oakland faculty.

**ELABORATION OF AN ISLAMIC STUDIES MINOR  
WITHIN THE PROPOSAL FOR A NEW PROGRAM IN RELIGIOUS STUDIES  
AT OAKLAND UNIVERSITY**

Islamic Studies would be one of several potential minors within a proposed religious studies program. (Minors focusing on the academic study of other religious cultures and traditions would include Judaism and Christianity.)

**Specific requirements for an Islamic Studies minor would include the following:**

**Credits**

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|----|---|
| 4  | 1. <i>Either</i> REL 100 (Introduction to Religion) <i>or</i> REL 150 (World Religious Traditions). These courses provide a comparative grounding for understanding Islam in relation to other major religious systems.   |
| 12 | 2. Students must take 3 courses selected from a list of substantive courses on specific topics related to Islam. Many of these courses would need to be developed, approved, and offered on a regular basis. However, several courses already exist at Oakland that would be appropriate for the minor, namely: AH 104 ( <i>Introduction to Asian/Islamic Art</i> ), HST 356 ( <i>The Modern Middle East</i> ), HST 357 ( <i>The Arab-Israeli Conflict</i> ), and IS 270 ( <i>Introduction to the Middle East</i> ). Additional, appropriate courses that might readily be developed by current Oakland faculty members include <i>Arabic</i> , <i>Arabic Literature</i> (Carlo Coppola), <i>The Anthropology of Islamic Culture</i> (Peter Bertocci), <i>The History of Muslims in China</i> (Linda Benson), <i>The Politics of Islamic Revivalism</i> (Paul Kubicek), <i>Fundamentals of the Islamic Religious Tradition</i> , (Bertocci and Coppola), and <i>Islamic People's Immigration and Adaptation to the West</i> (Abdi Kusow). All of these courses could be cross-listed in the appropriate departments of Art History, English, History, Modern Languages, Political Science, Sociology and Anthropology, and in the Center for International Studies. |
| 4  | 3. Students may elect <i>one</i> of the following options:<br><br>Internship in Islamic Community Service Project.<br><br>An additional Islamic Studies approved course.<br><br>Independent Study/Directed Reading within approved Islamic Studies topic area.  |

# **ELABORATION OF A CHRISTIANITY STUDIES MINOR WITHIN THE PROPOSAL FOR A NEW PROGRAM IN RELIGIOUS STUDIES AT OAKLAND UNIVERSITY**

Christianity Studies would be one of several potential minors within a proposed religious studies program. (Minors focusing on the academic study of other religious cultures and traditions would include Islam and Judaism.)

**Specific requirements for a Christianity Studies minor would include the following:**

## **Credits**

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|----|--|
| 4  | 1. <i>Either</i> REL 100 (Introduction to Religion) <i>or</i> REL 150 (World Religious Traditions). These courses provide a comparative grounding for understanding Christianity in relation to other major religious systems.   |
| 12 | 2. Students must take 3 courses selected from a list of substantive courses on specific topics related to Christianity. A number of appropriate courses for such a list are already offered at Oakland, namely: AH 322 ( <i>Early Medieval, Byzantine, and Romanesque Art</i> ), AH 326 ( <i>Gothic Art</i> ), HST 324, HST 325 ( <i>Europe, 300-1100</i> ), HST 327 ( <i>The Reformation</i> ), HST 328 ( <i>Medieval Europe, 1100-1500</i> ), HST 357, PHL 205 ( <i>Medieval Philosophy</i> ), and REL 300 ( <i>Catholicism and Contemporary Culture</i> ). All of these existing courses (except REL 300) are currently cross-listed as religious studies courses in the indicated academic departments. Additional appropriate courses could be developed as deemed necessary to broaden coverage, for example: <i>Introduction to Christianity Studies</i> , <i>Varieties of Christianity</i> , <i>Christian Origins and the Historical Jesus</i> , <i>The Politics of Christian Fundamentalism</i> , <i>Christian Ethical Thought</i> , and so on. |
| 4  | 3. Students may elect <i>one</i> of the following options:   |
|    | Internship in Christian Community Service Project  |
|    | An additional Christianity Studies approved course   |
|    | Independent Study/Directed Reading within approved Christianity Studies topic area.  |

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20    Total Credits

## **Administrative Issues**

The creation of three religious studies minors as proposed above would also necessitate creating a more visible, stable, and effective academic entity than that provided by the current concentration (which is not widely known, is administratively amorphous, and is totally dependent upon faculty volunteerism). “Program” would probably be the most useful designation. While most of the current programs in the College of Arts and Sciences offer majors (e.g., Communications, Journalism, Bio-Chemistry, Environmental Health, and Women Studies), a Program in Religious Studies, as currently proposed, would not. However, one existing program in the college offers neither a major nor a minor, namely the Program in Rhetoric. Thus there is at least precedence in the college for establishing a non-degree program in order to facilitate administration of a particular, desired academic purpose. In comparison, a Program in Religious Studies would at least offer a minor; it would also continue to offer students the alternative credential of completing the requirements of a concentration.

There would need to be an administrative director of the program with a full-year (12-month) commitment for the duration of the appointment. Planning, developing, and coordinating program course offerings in three different minors and a concentration for each academic semester would alone require a substantial commitment of time and effort. Additional necessary tasks that would increase the scope of necessary administrative commitment would include hiring of part-time instructors for some of the courses, supervision or monitoring of part-time instructors, evaluation of course offerings, and assessment of the program as a whole. Finally, there would also be an ongoing need to advertise and promote the program; to advise students in the program; to coordinate and evaluate internship placements; to seek, allocate, and administer scholarship funds; and to respond on behalf of the program to various college and university administrative requirements and initiatives applicable to all academic units.

Presumably the director would be a currently tenured member of the Oakland faculty. The director would thus “live” in the academic department in which he or she already has a primary appointment, as is the case for directors of other CAS programs. Given the scope of responsibilities outlined above, the faculty director would need to have a released teaching load of at least two courses per year. The resultant loss of credit delivery and curriculum offerings within the director’s academic department would be made up through compensatory part-time funding to the department.

Formation of an executive advisory committee—composed of faculty representing different, contributing disciplines—would be desirable for its creative input and other forms of guidance, planning, and general task assistance to the director. Perhaps the best current example at Oakland of such a committee is the Women’s Studies Executive Committee. This committee consists of a disciplinary cross-section of faculty members committed to women’s studies, meets regularly, and has been extremely valuable in helping the director steer the course of a newly established and developing program. A similarly composed and functioning committee, following this model, would constitute a real asset for the proposed expanded program in religious studies.

## **Programmatic Issues**

Although it would theoretically be possible for students to construct a schedule of courses that would satisfy requirements for both a minor in a particular religious tradition and the general concentration in religion without undue overlap between the two, such an enterprise would consume a total of 48 credits. Students would still have to satisfy the requirements of a major (usually 40 credits) in addition

to other university and college required courses. Such a combination of requirements would typically retard a student's graduation from Oakland by quite a few credits. As a rule, therefore, students would need to decide whether to enroll in a specific minor or in the general concentration and would not be allowed to do both.

Students would be allowed to use a non-designated religious studies course (particularly when transferred from another institution to Oakland) as credit towards the minor if that course sufficiently covers material appropriate to the minor. This would follow the same model used throughout the university in other academic programs. If a student can demonstrate to the satisfaction of the director (and/or perhaps to a religious studies executive committee) that a non-designated religious studies course has sufficient content relevant to the minor in question, then a petition to receive credit towards the minor for that course would be granted.

### **Departmental Support Within the College**

Attached below, as Appendix 2, is a memo that summarizes this proposal for an expanded Religious Studies Program to the department chairs of Art History, English, History, Political Science, and Sociology-Anthropology and that requests their reaction to the proposal. Included with the memo are the chairs' responses.