

**Motion: Approval of RELN-203 for Addition to Core Curriculum**  
**Referred by: Faculty Senate Executive Council**

**Motion**

The Faculty Senate approves the addition of RELN-203, Sacred Texts of the West, for credit in the Core Curriculum in the area of Humanities (University Core B, College Core B). RELN-200, Survey of New Testament, and RELN-202, Survey of Old Testament, will be deleted from the Core Curriculum offerings.

**Rationale**

RELN-203 has been approved by the Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies, by the College of Humanities and Behavioral Sciences Curriculum Committee, by the Dean of the College of Humanities and Behavioral Sciences, and by the General Education Curricular Advisory Committee/Core Curriculum Committee. When the Core Curriculum was developed, the Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies agreed to offer RELN-200 and RELN-202 for Core Curriculum Humanities credit during the 2009-2010 academic year, while preparing a single sacred texts courses (RELN-203) to be offered for Core Curriculum Humanities credit effective in the 2010-2011 academic year.

# Cover Sheet for Proposal to the Undergraduate Curriculum and Catalog Review Committee

Note: For new courses, use the New Course Proposal Form

Proposal Number (Assigned by the Registrar):

Date: 10/16/2009

Department: PHRE

Contact Person: Dr. Paul B. Thomas

Course or Program ID: RELN 203

Proposal Category (check all that apply):

Course Prerequisite Change

Course Title Change (23 characters):

Course Deletion

Course Number Change

Program Revision (Attach Revision of Existing Program Form)

Course Credit Hour Change

New Course (attach New Course Proposal Form)

Course Syllabi Change

Change to Catalog Description

Minor Change to Course

Proposal Description with Rationale (State current status, proposed change, and why the change is desired. Attach additional sheets if necessary. If the proposal in any way alters the requirements for the program, complete the Revision of Existing Program section of this form):

Rationale: In fall 2008, the Philosophy and Religious Studies Department in consultation with GECAC decided to create a scriptures course to replace RELN 200 Survey of the New Testament and RELN 202 Survey of the Old Testament for general education credit in the Humanities area of Core B. We agreed that the focus of RELN 200 and RELN 202 was too narrow for a general education course. Given the requirement that new core curriculum courses be approved by department and college curriculum committees, GECAC, the Faculty Senate and UGCCRC, it was agreed that the new scriptures course would be replace Survey of the New Testament and Survey of the Old Testament in the Humanities area in the 2010-2011 academic year.

Approved proposals traditionally go into effect the next academic year. However, if seeking an alternative effective date, please indicate the requested date in the space provided below, along with reason:

Effective Date: Fall 2010

Reason for requesting an alternative effective date (please type or write in your reason for the change here):

Include a copy of the old and new syllabi to this proposal for comparison.

For Program Revisions, attach the Revision of Existing Program Form and include both the current and proposed program.

For New Course Proposals, attach the New Course Proposal and Assessment of Library Resources Forms with appropriate signatures.

**Special Note:** Changes to course syllabi must be submitted to the Registrar's Office on either a 3 1/4 floppy disk or ZIP disk after final approval by the Vice President for Academic Affairs.

Signatures on File

Signature	Title	Date
Kay K. Jordan	Department Curriculum Committee Chair	10/16/2009
William Kennan	Department Chair	
Jeff Wilner	College Curriculum Committee Chair	
Brian P. Conniff	College Dean	
If this proposal in any way affects a professional education program, it must be submitted to and approved by the Professional Education Committee and the Faculty Senate:		
	Professional Education Committee Chair	
Roann Barris	General Education Curriculum Advisory Committee Chair	
	Faculty Senate President	
	UG Curriculum & Catalog Review Committee	
	VP for Academic Affairs	

Revised 08/17/05

Proposal # \_\_\_\_\_

## **New Course Proposal**

### **1. Catalogue Entry**

**Department Prefix:** RELN

**Course Number:** 203

**Course Title:** Sacred Texts of the West

**Prerequisite:** none

**Credit Hours:** 3

#### **Brief Description of Course**

Through critical reading of selections from the Old Testament, the New Testament, and the Qur'an, students will become familiar with the content of these texts; students will engage in the critical interpretation of these sacred texts; and students will be introduced to the methods and theories that support the academic study of sacred texts and narratives. Not limited in historical context and scope, students will be introduced to the social and historical factors that influenced the development of each canon in its original context as well as examining how religious communities work to ensure the continued relevance of their sacred texts and narratives. This course has been approved for Core Curriculum credit in Humanities.

### **2. Detailed Description of the Course**

#### **a. Content**

This course is divided into three parts, reflecting the three great religious traditions of the West--Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Each part will examine the development of each tradition's sacred texts within their original social and historical contexts, the canonization process, the major theological themes of each, and the sources and materials that comprise each of the texts.

##### **1) Hebrew Bible/Old Testament**

This portion of the course will examine the various sources that later comprised the Hebrew canon, including saga, poetry, songs, legends, and myth. Students will be asked to examine the forces that pressured the Israelites to write and close a sacred canon. As the canon was closed in stages, students will become familiar with the dating of the component parts of Hebrew scripture and will be able to identify at what historical point each part of the canon (Torah, Prophets, and Writings) was closed. The primary theological concerns of the Old Testament will receive sustained attention, including the nature/characteristics and development of the idea of the universal God, covenant, and Old Testament conceptions of history.

## 2) New Testament

This part of the course will examine the various sources that comprise the New Testament, including parables, sayings, gospels, letters, and apocalypse. In addition, students will be introduced to theories regarding the dating of each of the New Testament texts as well as identifying dating clues within the texts. Here students will also learn about the political and social forces behind the closing of the New Testament as well as examining why certain texts were included while others were rejected. Topics receiving particular attention will include the historical Jesus and the contours of the earliest Jesus Movements and the importance of the Pauline epistles and theology for the development of Christianity as a world religion.

## 3) Qur'an

As with the prior portions of this course, the examination of the Qur'an begins with its development in historical context. This will include an examination of sixth century Arabian culture as well as Muhammad's own social background. Students will examine the reception of the Prophet's message in Mecca and Medina and will appreciate how his message was influenced by the social context in addition to addressing Muhammad's particular concerns regarding Arabian society. Students will learn about Qur'anic conceptions of God, the relationship between the Qur'an and the Old and New Testaments, the Qur'anic view of prophecy, and the Qur'an's presentation of the pre-Islamic religions of Arabia.

### **b. Detailed Description of the Conduct of the Course**

This course will be conducted through lecture and discussion and may include the use of film. The importance of exegetical skills will be emphasized by requiring students to analyze brief portions of sacred texts in terms of historical context and literary characteristics, writing a short summary, and presenting the results to the class. Content knowledge will be measured through quizzes and exams.

### **c. Student Goals and Objectives of the Course**

- 1) In this course students will examine some of the world's most influential religious texts.
- 2) Students in this course will analyze the concept of scripture as well as describe various approaches to the study of scripture, including textual criticism, historical criticism, and reception history.
- 3) Students will analyze sacred texts as created documents, formed in social and historical contexts.

- 4) Students will describe how broader cultural contexts impacted the development of Western sacred texts and narratives.
- 5) Though the term scripture implies a written text, students will analyze the important oral functions of sacred texts.
- 6) Students will examine the concept that scripture is a relational category and that the sacredness of any given text is only derived from communities that respond to the text as something sacred and holy.

#### **d. Assessment Measures**

Grades may be derived from exams, class presentations, group projects, short explication exercises, and a research paper.

#### **e. Other Course Information**

Reading assignments may include selections from the following:

##### **Possible textbooks include:**

NRSV Bible and The Qur'an

Davies, Philip R. *Scribes and Schools: The Canonization of the Hebrew Scriptures*. Louisville: Westminster, 1998.

Ehrman, Bart. *A Brief Introduction to the New Testament*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2004.

Mattson, Ingrid. *The Story of the Qur'an: Its History and Place in Muslim Life*. Malden, MA: Oxford: Blackwell, 2008.

### **3. Background and Justification**

#### **a. Need for the Course**

- 1) This course will fulfill the requirements of the Humanities area of the new core curriculum.
  - A) The course is important for the study of the Humanities because some of the most profound answers regarding the human condition are found in sacred narratives.
  - B) The course employs the methods of textual criticism, form criticism, historical criticism, redaction criticism, and reception history. Hence, students will not only understand methods current in the humanities, they will be well prepared to apply these critical approaches to the study of any text. These methods will also equip students with the necessary tools to evaluate texts according to their social and historical context.

C) The breadth and comparative nature of this course allows students to describe and explain differing views of the meaning, value, and purpose of life .

2) The course will support several PHRE Learning Outcomes common to both the philosophy and religious studies concentrations:

- A) The use of discussion groups and written assignments increases proficiency in oral and written communication.
- B) The close reading of sacred texts, and the application of textual criticism, will increase and enhance reading comprehension.
- C) Understanding and critiquing sacred narratives in their modern context will enhance student's knowledge of contemporary social, political, and cultural developments.
- D) Exegetical exercises and research papers will demand that students conduct discipline-specific research.
- E) In this course students will perform basic intellectual operations—defining, comparing, etc.—in the context of discipline-specific issues and problems.

3) The course will address several PHRE Learning Outcomes specific to the religious studies concentration:

- A) Study of these texts will familiarize students with the core ideas, central figures, and formative episodes in the Jewish, Christian, and Islamic religious traditions.
- B) The use of textual criticism and historical criticism will familiarize students with the critical methods employed in religious studies.
- C) Applying reception history to sacred narratives will familiarize students with the roles these sacred narratives play in the contemporary world.

4) The course will address the humanities area outcomes included in the University Core B objectives articulated in the Humanities Area.

Radford University students will understand the importance of the search for answers to humankind's most fundamental and profound questions and the ways in which these questions have been examined.

Radford University students will be able to:

- A). explain the nature and methods of inquiry in the humanities
- B). describe and explain differing views of the meaning, value, and purpose of life.
- C) explain historical, philosophical, religious, or literary sources according to societal or cultural perspectives
- D) interpret and critically evaluate historical, philosophical, religious, or literary expressions of the human experience

**b. Students for Whom Course is Offered**

- 1) The course is designed for
  - A) University Core B: Humanities and College Core B: Humanities
  - B) PHRE majors and minors with an interest in sacred narratives and/or Western religions.
  - D) Students for whom textual criticism is of interest at the core level.
  - D) Students interested in the history of Western religious traditions.
  - E) Students interested in modern interpretations of Western religious texts.

**c. Anticipated Enrollment**

25 students

**d. Frequency of Course Offerings**

Two sections of the course will be offered every year.

**e. Level and Prerequisites**

Level: 200; prerequisite: none. This course is intended to meet to needs of the University Core Curriculum. As such, there are no prerequisites.

**4. Rationale for Resources Required****a. Faculty Resources**

The course will not require additional faculty resources. It will be offered in rotation with other 200 level core curriculum courses.

**b. Effect on Existing Curricula**

The Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies believes that the study of sacred texts and narratives is an essential component in the critical study of religion. The creation of this course has been necessitated by the rejection of RELN 200: Survey of the New Testament and RELN 202: Survey of the Old Testament and as permanent courses in the core curriculum. The most immediate negative impact upon PHRE's curriculum may be a drop in enrollment in RELN 200 and RELN 202. However, as PHRE does not currently have a course on the Qur'an, and as one third of this course is devoted to the Qur'an, this course will help fill that gap and will attract students on this basis alone. RELN 200 Survey of the New Testament and RELN 202 Survey of the Old Testament will no longer be offered for Core Curriculum Credit. Instead, these courses are being revised and raised to 300 level courses.

This course will not impact another department. In anticipation of possible overlap with Eng. 420 (Introduction to Literary Criticism), the professor of that course was contacted. In addition, the English department does not offer a Bible as Literature course. The history department offers a course on the history of the Middle East, which does include Islam, but is not a sustained analysis of the Qur'an.



### **c. Facilities, Equipment and Supplies**

None

### **d. Library Resources**

Jessica Ireland has examined this proposal. Currently, the library possesses about fifty percent of the books required to support this course (see above). The balance may be purchased from PHRE's annual library budget.

Recommended Resources:

#### **Introductions:**

Coward, Harold. *Sacred Word and Sacred Text*. Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1988.

Frieser, James. *Scriptures of the West*. New York: McGraw-Hill, 2003.

#### **Theorizing Scripture:**

Graham, William A. *Beyond the Written Word: Oral Aspects of Ritual in the History of Religion*. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987.

Smith, Wilfred Cantwell. *What Is Scripture? A Comparative Approach*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993.

Alter, Robert. *Canon and Creativity: Modern Writing and the Authority of Scripture*. New Haven: Yale, 2000.

Coward, Harold. *Experiencing Scripture in World Religions*. Maryknoll: Orbis, 2000.

Griffiths, Paul J. *Religious Reading: The Place of Reading in the Practice of Religion*. Oxford: Oxford, 1999.

Smith, Jonathan Z. "Sacred Persistence: Toward a Redescription of Canon." In *Imagining Religion: From Babylon to Jonestown*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982, pp. 36-52.

Levering, Miriam, ed. *Rethinking Scripture: Essays From a Comparative Perspective*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989.

Denny, Frederick and Rodney Taylor, eds. *The Holy Book in Comparative Perspective*. Columbia: University of South Carolina, 1985.

Wimbush, Vincent L., ed. *Theorizing Scriptures: New Critical Orientations to a Cultural Phenomena*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2008.

**Case Studies:**

Akenson, Donald Harmon. *Surpassing Wonder: The Invention of the Bible and the Talmuds*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998.

Kling, David W. *The Bible in History: How the Texts Have Shaped the Times*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004.

Phy, Allene Stuart. "The Bible and American Popular Culture: an Overview and Introduction." In *The Bible and Popular Culture in America*. Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985, pp. 1-23.

Ehrman, Bart. *Misquoting Jesus: The Story Behind Who Changed the Bible and Why*. New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 2005.

Wadud, Amina. *Qur'an and Woman: Reading the Sacred Text From a Woman's Perspective*. New York: Oxford, 1999.

Rippin, Andrew. *Muslims: Their Religious Beliefs and Practices. Volume 2: The Contemporary Period*. London: Routledge, 1993.

Esposito, John. *The Islamic Threat: Myth or Reality?* 3d ed. New York: Oxford University Press, 1999.

Denny, Frederick Mathewson. *An Introduction to Islam*. 3d ed. New York: Macmillan, 2005.

Wheeler, Brannon M. *Prophets in the Qur'an: An Introduction to the Qur'an and Muslim Exegesis*. London; New York: Continuum, 2002.

**e. Computer Resources**

None

**f. Other Anticipated Resources**

None

Prepared by:

Paul B. Thomas

Signature of Faculty Member

Signature of Librarian assigned  
to requesting department

Paul B. Thomas (signature on file)

Jill Ireland (signature on file)

<b>Signature</b>	<b>Title</b>	<b>Date</b>
Kay K. Jordan	Department Curriculum Committee Chair	10/16/09
William Kennan	Department Chair	
Jeff Wilner	College Curriculum Committee Chair	
Brian P. Conniff	College Dean	
If this proposal in any way affects a professional education program, it must be submitted to and approved by the Professional Education Committee and the Faculty Senate:		
	Professional Education Committee Chair	
	General Education Curriculum Advisory Committee Chair	
	Faculty Senate President	
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