

Notice of Change for Major in Philosophy (Addition of a philosophy major option with a Religious Studies emphasis)

Date: 11/4/15

A. PROGRAM INFORMATION

1. Name of institution

University of Rhode Island

2. Name of department, division, school or college

Department: Philosophy

College: Arts and Sciences

3. Intended initiation date of program change. Include anticipated date for granting first degrees or certificates, if appropriate.

Initiation date: Fall 2016

First degree date: Spring 2018

4. Intended location of the program

Department of Philosophy, Chafee Building, University of Rhode Island, Kingston, RI, 02881

5. Summary description of proposed program (not to exceed 2 pages).

If applicable, please include the existing URI catalog language and proposed catalog language changes that relate to your request.

Reasons for requesting the addition of a religious studies track to the regular philosophy major

There are several reasons why URI's Department of Philosophy is proposing to add a "philosophy and religious studies option" to the regular Philosophy major:

First, looking at the history of the department, courses in religious studies have been offered for many years. Two were established in the 1960s, two more were added in the 1970s, and two additional ones in 1980. Originally these courses (all six of them) were offered under the PHL course designation. In 1985, the PHL designation of these six courses was changed to RLS, but they continued counting towards the philosophy major.¹ Thus, the department offered, in effect, a major track with a religious studies emphasis, in addition to a regular track, except there was no clear demarcation between the two and the religious studies track was ill-defined, in contrast to what is proposed here. (As documented through the 2/22/1990 Faculty Senate bill, in 1990, two of the six RLS courses were discontinued [the person who had taught them regularly had retired]; the four remaining RLS courses continued to be offered, but were eliminated from what counted toward the philosophy major.)

Second, there always has been great interest in the religion courses offered by the department, whether under the PHL or RLS codes. Students currently take the RLS courses as electives or as general education courses. During the 2014-2015 Academic Year, for example, the total enrollment in RLS sections offered by the Philosophy Department was 686 students.

Third, there are several PHL courses in which topics related to religious studies are covered.

¹ For details, see Faculty Senate Bill 4/4/1985, accessible through the following link:
http://digitalcommons.uri.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=2080&context=facsen_bills

Fourth, as a result of the Provost's Office's "cluster hire" initiative, a faculty member specializing in Islamic thought has been hired, holding a joint appointment between Philosophy (1/3) and Political Science (2/3). This person (Dr. Katrin Jomaa) is enriching the religious studies offerings at the University. Presently, she has proposed two courses that are intended to be part of the proposed Philosophy major track with a religious studies emphasis: RLS 221/PSC 221 (Islam and Its Civilization) and PHL 421/PSC 421 (Secularism and Islamism in the Modern World)².

Bearing in mind the interest in RLS courses and the addition of new courses germane to the study of religion, the Philosophy Department is proposing to add, to the regular philosophy major, a philosophy major track with a religious studies emphasis. The new track will consist of two components. First, it will require seven philosophy courses indispensable for a major in philosophy; some of them are geared toward religious studies topics (PHL 101 or 205; PHL 212; PHL 321; PHL 323; PHL 328; PHL 341 or 346; PHL 490³). Second, students will be required to take five religious studies courses and to proceed through three levels: 1) Two courses will provide an elementary familiarity with the three so-called Western religions, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam (RLS 111) and with Eastern religions such as Hinduism and Buddhism (RLS 131: Introduction to Asian Philosophies and Religions); 2) Two intermediate courses will provide more familiarity with two religions (RLS 226—Christian Thought – Agreements and Differences⁴; PSC 221/ RLS 221—Islam and its Civilization); and 3) At least one course will be taken to attain more in-depth knowledge: either (PHL 331—East Asian Thought) or PHL 421/PSC 421—Secularism and Islamism in the Modern World.

Justification—theoretical and practical

It is, of course, hard to predict how many students will select this new option; but given the significant interest in religions studies courses (see the 2014-15 enrollment figure, above), it is to be expected that there will be an appreciable number of majors.

Like a general philosophy major, the religion track option is not meant as specific job preparation; but it will give students general knowledge about matters educated people ought to know. Further, as for all BA majors, the new option will give students a well-rounded background providing valuable skills for many different occupations such as law, divinity studies, journalism, government and politics, and business. All the practical benefits explained in the following webpage (accessed 10/6/15) would apply to persons graduating in the proposed Philosophy & Religious Studies major: <http://everydaylife.globalpost.com/benefits-getting-bachelor-arts-degree-20478.html>

An additional practical reason supporting the religion track is as follows: In the realm of politics, the religions to be studied in the program play a prominent role. The political unrest in Northern Ireland, Africa, the Middle East, the Balkans, and between India and Pakistan (to name a few examples) cannot be adequately explained without an understanding of some of its religious components. Because one cannot find solutions to problems that one does not understand, the study of religion is indispensable to anyone hoping to address these issues.

Catalog entry {items between [] are explanations to the committee; they are not intended for the catalog}

[As noted in footnotes 2 and 4, the proposal includes two new cross-listed courses (PSC 221/RLS 221 and PHL 421/PSC 421), as well as a RLS course with a change in level, title, and course description (RLS 226). Under normal circumstances, the proposals to introduce/change these courses would be submitted as attachments to this request to introduce the new philosophy major track. Given the current mode of how general education proposals are to be submitted, however, for the new courses, two forms with "New Course Proposal" checked have been submitted; for the third course, a form with "Changed Course Proposal" checked has been turned in. It is our understanding that GEIST and/or the General Education Committee will turn these forms over to the Arts and Sciences Curriculum Committee as

² Proposals for two new courses, PCS 221/RLS 221 and PHL 421/PSC 421 have been submitted to and approved by the A&S Curricular Affairs Committee (CAC). The courses are now in the pipeline for further review and approval by the University CAC and the Faculty Senate.

³ Philosophy course codes and titles: PHL 101 (Critical Thinking); PHL 205 (Philosophical Topics); PHL 212 (Ethics); PHL 321 (Ancient Philosophy); PHL 323 (Modern Philosophy: Descartes to Kant); PHL 328 (The Philosophy of Religion); PHL 341 (Introduction to Metaphysics); PHL 346 (Existential Problems in Human Life); PHL 490 (Senior Seminar in Philosophy).

⁴ A proposal to change the level, title, and description of the current RLS 126 (Development of Christian Thought) course has been submitted. The new code will be RLS 226. Thus far, the changes have been accepted by the A&S CAC.

well as to the Faculty Senate Curricular Affairs Committee.]

Philosophy

[Note: Changes to the requirements as stated in the current catalog are indicated by cross-outs and underlining.]

The Department of Philosophy offers a Bachelor of Arts (B.A.) degree. Students may elect either the general option or the option with the religious studies emphasis.

Faculty: Susan Brady, chairperson. Professors Foster, Krieger, Johnson, J. Peterson, and Wenisch; Associate Professors Meghani and Mollgaard; Assistant Professor Jomaa (joint appointment with PSC); Professors Emeriti Y. Kim, Schwarz, and Zeyl.

Students selecting ~~this major~~ the general option must complete no fewer than 33 credits (maximum 48) in philosophy. Students are required to take PHL 205; at least one from PHL 101, 451 (logic); at least one from PHL 212, 314 (ethics); at least one from PHL 341, 342, 452; both PHL 321 and 323; at least one from PHL 204, 318, 324, 346; and PHL 490 [capstone]. The remaining nine credits may be chosen freely from the list of PHL courses offered by the department. At least 18 credits in course work must be at the 300 level or above. For this degree, courses taken in RLS will be classified as electives or to fulfill a general education requirement.

Students selecting the option with the Religious Studies emphasis must complete no fewer than 37 credits (maximum 48). From the philosophy courses, they must take: PHL 101 or 205; PHL 212; PHL 321; PHL 323; PHL 328; PHL 341 or 346; and PHL 490. From the religious studies courses, they must take: RLS 111; RLS 131; RLS 226; PCS 221/RLS 221; and PHL 331 or PHL 421/PSC 421. At least 18 credits in course work must be at the 300 level or above.

~~A~~For both options, a total of 120 credits is required for graduation, and at least 42 of the credits must be in courses numbered 300 or above.

Special pleading

Currently, the maximum number of credits that can be required for a BA degree is 36, which corresponds to 12 three-credit courses. Given the combination of philosophy and religion courses in the new track proposed here, we consider 12 courses as an educationally sound minimum (many students will, of course, take additional courses). Since, however, two courses are cross-listed with PSC, and since the Political Science Department went over to the 4-credit system, students choosing this track the way it is set up now must take at least one 4-credit course, which brings the number of credits up to 37. Thus, we ask that an exception to the 36-credits-maximum rule be made.

6. Signature of the President

David M. Dooley