

St. Olaf College OLE Core General Education Curriculum Religion, Faith, and Values Requirement

Description:

This course builds religious literacy with a focus on one religious tradition or a set of related religious traditions. Students develop the skills necessary for critically interpreting and understanding religious life as well as a more complex understanding of religion's place in the world. This includes the relationship of religion with community and/or the natural world, and its role in answering fundamental questions about existence, meaning, and ethics.

Intended Learning Outcomes:

Students will:

1. Critically interpret religious life.
2. Identify how religious life shapes the world and human understanding.
3. Identify how the world shapes religious life.

Course Guidelines:

Developing a working understanding of religious life requires the ability to understand it from several perspectives. After completion of the course, students will understand important elements of a specific type of religious life from the perspectives of both adherents and outside observers. The course might also provide students opportunities to reflect upon their own religious or non-religious identity. In their course of study, it may prove useful for students to consider broad questions about religion like: What is religion? What does it mean to live a religious life? What kinds of practices are commonly incorporated into religious communities? Examination of these questions should help students critically interpret the specific type of religious life that is the focus of the course as this course is not a world religions or survey of religion course.

1. Critically interpret religious life.

- a. Definitions of religious life are specific to the religion in question but in general this concept refers to the texts, symbols, beliefs, experiences, and activities through which religious communities and individuals within those communities make sense of and give meaning to the world around them. The key elements of religious life vary according to the religious tradition under examination as well as the internal diversity present in each tradition. Thus, the specific topics investigated by students will be dictated by the specific religion upon which the course is focused.
- b. Critical study of religious life requires utilizing methods appropriate to the phenomena being examined. The study of sacred texts, for example, involves textual, historical, and cultural analysis along with consideration of the community or tradition's religious concerns. Individuals or specific religious groups may be the subject of this course as ways of introducing particular religious traditions so long as they are taken as part of, dissenting from, or otherwise contributing to a particular religious tradition.
- c. Critical interpretation of religious life requires both thinking descriptively and

analytically in methodologically appropriate ways about the commitments and practices of the religious life studied from the perspective of an adherent as well as an outside observer.

2. Identify how religious life shapes the world and human understanding.

Religious life has effects beyond itself. For example, religious ideas affect law, economies, industry, natural science, family systems, literature and the arts, and much more.

3. Identify how the world shapes religious life.

Critical interpretation of religion requires analyzing religion according to its composition, influence, and emergence from non-religious factors. These factors might be material, social, historical, or otherwise. For example, a biblical studies course might examine how Rome's imperial power influenced the gospel writers' accounts of Jesus of Nazareth. These factors may not be recognized by the religious communities; they may even be at odds with religious people's own self-understanding. For example, historical factors influencing the creation of sacred texts may be invisible to the community that takes them as authoritative.