

Curricular Affairs Committee of the Faculty Senate

To: The UVM Faculty Senate
From: Curricular Affairs Committee of the Faculty Senate, Laura Almstead, Chair
Date: January 3, 2019
Re: Approval of a proposal for a new Undergraduate Certificate in Religious Literacy in Professions by the College of Arts and Sciences

At its meeting on January 3, 2019, the Curricular Affairs Committee approved the actions recommended in the following memo.

The Curricular Affairs Committee approved a proposal for a new Undergraduate Certificate in Religious Literacy in Professions submitted by the College of Arts and Sciences (CAS), Department of Religion. The Chair of the department, Thomas Borchert, will oversee the proposed certificate. If approved by the Faculty Senate and Board of Trustees, the program will be offered beginning fall 2019.

Program Description and Rationale

Religions have and continue to shape all aspects of human life, and as such are vital influences to understand in a broad range of professions. The proposed certificate in Religious Literacy in Professions seeks to prepare students for encounters with diverse religions, religious individuals, and religious frameworks. It is primarily aimed at students seeking careers in education, journalism, social services, business, and health fields who wish to deepen their working knowledge about religions, religious individuals, and religiously defined groups or organizations, but who are not interested in or whose majors preclude a Religion Minor.

In the proposal, the proposers cite the definition of religious literacy below by Diane L. Moore of Harvard's Religious Literacy Project, which informed development of the proposed certificate.

“Religious literacy entails the ability to discern and analyze the fundamental intersections of religion and social/political/cultural life through multiple lenses. Specifically, a religiously literate person will possess 1) a basic understanding of the history, central texts (where applicable), beliefs, practices and contemporary manifestations of several of the world’s religious traditions and expressions as they arose out of and continue to be shaped by particular social, historical and cultural contexts; and 2) the ability to discern and explore the religious dimensions of political, social and cultural expressions across time and place.” (Diane L. Moore, “Overcoming Religious Illiteracy: A Cultural Studies Approach,” World History Connected, November 2006. <http://worldhistoryconnected.press.uiuc.edu/4.1/moore.html>)

Students in the proposed Certificate in Religious Literacy in Professions will learn:

- The difference between devotional expressions of religious worldviews and the study of religion;
- That religions are internally diverse, evolve and change, and their practice varies in time, place, and custom;
- Religious influences are embedded in human experience and affect people who self-identify as religious as well as those who do not;

- Religious knowledge claims, like all other knowledge claims, are situated, contextual, and constructed;
- Peace, war, violence, and levels of religiosity are not inevitable, fixed, or predicated on the “type” of religion one engages in/is operative in one’s community

Justification and Evidence for Demand

Development of the proposed Religious Literacy in Professions Certificate was prompted by the observation that students from outside CAS as well as CAS Bachelor of Science students take religion courses in an attempt to better understand people with whom they will interact in their future careers. The proposers hope that the proposed certificate will create an opportunity for students in pre-professional programs and others to add value to their degrees with a stated achievement in Religious Literacy. The proposed certificate will also help fulfill the University Common Ground mission of teaching justice, as religion intersects with many types of oppressive histories and regimes as well as peace-seeking movements and institutions.

Relationship to Existing Programs

There are no certificate programs in religious literacy at any other universities in the US. The proposed certificate bears some resemblance to the existing Minor in Religion at UVM, however the latter is more specifically organized around academic models for understanding religion in societies. The proposed Certificate in Religious Literacy in Professions is primarily aimed at students whose professional interests bring them in contact with different religions. It also provides an option for students interested in obtaining some background in religious literacy whose other requirements preclude an eighteen credit minor.

Curriculum

Completion of the proposed Religious Literacy in Professions Certificate requires a total of thirteen credits (see table below). Students must take at least one zero-level course first, which will serve as a pre-requisite to the 100-level courses. Although REL 105 Religious Literacy can be completed after taking only one Religion course, it is recommended that students take it as the third or fourth course in the series.

Required Courses

Number	Name	Credits
Two zero-level introductory courses (REL 0XX)		6 total
One 100-level intermediate course (REL 1XX)		3
REL 105	Religious Literacy	3
REL 112	Religious Literacy Practicum	1

REL 105 and REL 112 are new courses developed for the certificate; Religion major and minors will also be able to take REL 105 as part of their degree requirements. Together, these courses comprise the integrative learning component that distinguishes Undergraduate Certificates. In REL 105, students will write three reflective essays tailored to the student’s particular field and complete an “applied jigsaw unit” that breaks the class up into parts and, when put back together, helps students teach each other about the whole puzzle. In REL 112, students will apply theories and histories of religious literacy to complete a research project tailored to their fields that is centered around a field-specific case study. Both courses are progressing through the course approval process and should be in the catalog next year.

Admission Requirements, Advising, and Assessment

The Certificate in Religious Literacy in Professions will be open to all undergraduates. Students pursuing the proposed certificate will be directed to the Department Chair if they have questions.

Faculty in the department will be responsible for oversight of the curriculum for the proposed certificate. The Department will review the enrollment and curriculum periodically to ensure that the goals of the certificate are being met. It will also be included in the Department's Academic Program Review.

Anticipated Enrollment and Impact on Current Programs

The proposers anticipate a limited enrollment that will grow slowly over the next four years and do not anticipate inauguration of the certificate will have an effect on any other programs or significantly change course enrollments.

Resource Requirements

No new resources are required. Current faculty workloads can accommodate teaching the new courses. REL 105 will be offered every year. REL 112 will be offered on an as-needed basis for students in the proposed certificate.

Evidence of Support

The proposed Certificate in Religious Literacy in Professions was approved by the CAS Curriculum Committee and faculty. The Dean of CAS, Bill Falls, also indicated his support. Letters of support were also provided by the Dean of the College of Education and Social Services, the Dean of the Rubenstein School of Environment and Natural Resources, and the Associate Dean of the College of Nursing and Health Sciences.

Summary

The proposed Certificate in Religious Literacy in Professions is a unique and valuable program that will provide students seeking careers in education, journalism, social services, business, and health fields a targeted opportunity to learn the fundamentals of diverse religions, religious persons, and religious frameworks. Additionally, it helps to fulfill the University Common Ground mission of teaching justice. The curriculum offers students the opportunity to directly apply concepts of religious literacy to their field of interest. Therefore, the proposed certificate will be a beneficial addition UVM's current Undergraduate Certificates.