MEMO TO: Gary Beach, Sarah Williams, Office of Academic Programs, Assessment, and Accreditation

RE: Request for “RELS” designator for courses in Religious Studies

Request
The School of History, Philosophy, and Religion, College of Liberal Arts, requests a new course designator, “RELS,” to designate courses that reflect the academic field of religious studies within the School.

Purpose
What academic programs, including majors, certificates, options and minors will be served by courses within the designator?
The designator “RELS” is requested for (a) the current undergraduate certificate in Religion and Culture and for (b) a proposed major in Religious Studies to be submitted in January 2014 through the Curricular Proposal System.

In what ways do the general area and scope of the content constitute a coherent body of knowledge?
The academic field of religious studies is one of the most prominent humanistic fields of inquiry. Specific academic methods address human practices of ritual, symbol, and ethical action; views about the world, the sacred, and human origins, identity, and destiny, as conveyed through myths, narratives, and liturgy or modes of worship; the development and interpretation of sacred texts; and ways in which religion plays diverse roles in civic and public life.

Is the proposed usage of the designator consistent with practice at OSU and other institutions? Give examples.
There are diverse designators for religious studies at institutions across the nation. Within Oregon, Lewis and Clark and Linfield use RELS and Willamette and the University of Oregon use REL. We want to avoid a usage of “RST” at some institutions as that could be confusing with our School designator of “HST” for History courses. We find “RELS” a preferable way to communicate that our program engages in the academic study of religion, as conveyed by the “S,” rather than teaching religion, which can be confusing with the designator “REL.”

Accountability
What is the academic College of the designator?
The College of Liberal Arts, School of History, Philosophy, and Religion

Who is responsible for administering courses in the designator, e.g. scheduling and catalog updates. Who are the faculty contact persons?
David Bishop (david.bishop@oregonstate.edu), academic advisor for the School of History, Philosophy, and Religion, has principal responsibility for course administration and scheduling. Courtney Campbell (ccampbell@oregonstate.edu), who oversees the Hundere Endowment in Religion and Culture and the undergraduate Certificate in Religion and Culture, is the primary faculty contact.
Who is responsible for consistency and outcome assessment for courses in the designator?

Learning outcomes and assessment methods for courses in the designator have been developed by Courtney Campbell, in consultation with academic advisors David Bishop (History) and David Arnold (Philosophy). Coherence, consistency, and assessment of courses will be conducted by three faculty with doctoral degrees in religious studies – Courtney Campbell, Amy Koehlinger, and Stuart Sarbacker.

Which units get credit for the SCH generated by courses in the subject code?

Per current practice, the School of History, Philosophy, and Religion will receive student credit hours under the RELS designation.

Who is responsible for communicating information about the new designator to stakeholders, including advisors, Admissions, and students?

The primary persons responsible for communication of information about the RELS designator and its courses will be Robert Peckno, Publicity Representative for the School of History, Philosophy, and Religion, and David Bishop, lead academic advisor.

Impacts

Will courses in the new designator duplicate or compete with existing ones?

No, there are no courses at Oregon State University that would be duplicated by courses listed through the new designation.

Are there expected cross-listings or curricular equivalencies?

Currently, courses to be listed as religious studies in the new designator are identified as History (HST) and/or Philosophy (PHL) courses. Our Category I major proposal will continue some cross-listings where the subject matter incorporates historical analysis or philosophical inquiry in addition to religious studies content.

How will the new designator affect transfer credits?

The designator should streamline decisions regarding transfer credits. Under our current listings, we receive requests for credit from students who have taken courses in religious studies at another institution and we must try to match closely their coursework with an OSU course that has a PHL (Philosophy) designation. This creates certain administrative inefficiencies that should be eliminated with the new designator.

Will any previous existing designators expire as the new one appears?

No.

How will the new designator benefit students?

The primary way the new designator will benefit students is through greater transparency about the content and methods of the course they are enrolling in. Currently, courses that are explicitly in the field of religious studies (World Religions, Introduction to Religious Studies, Introduction to Buddhism, etc.) are listed under a PHL or Philosophy designator. Moreover, the designation will indicate to students that there is a distinctive field of study that they can pursue through an undergraduate certificate or the proposed major.