

THE UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA AT ASHEVILLE
FACULTY SENATE

Senate Document Number 5715S

Date of Senate Approval 03/19/15

Statement of Faculty Senate Action:

APC Document 49 (RELS): **Delete RELS 490 and replace it with RELS 492**

Effective Date: Fall 2015

1. Delete: On page 260, **RELS 490**, Senior Research Seminar:

490 Senior Research Seminar (3)

Student research under the supervision of approved faculty resulting in the successful completion and oral presentation of a written thesis or comparable research project. This course fulfills the requirements for oral competency. An IP grade may be awarded at the discretion of the instructor. Prerequisite: RELS 398. Fall.

Add: On page 260, new course, **RELS 492**, Senior Seminar in Religious Studies:

492 Senior Seminar in Religious Studies (4)

A capstone course that is required for all Religious Studies majors but open to any student who meets the prerequisites, the Senior Seminar explores a selected topic in the study of religion from multiple theoretical and methodological approaches. Religious Studies majors will fulfill their writing and oral competencies by completing this course with a grade of C or better. This course may be repeated for a total of 8 hours when topics vary. Prerequisite: RELS 398 with a grade of C or better or permission of the instructor. Fall.

Impact: This proposed change will have no negative impact on staffing or other departmental resources: RELS 492 will continue to be offered every fall semester as RELS 490 has been. The topical focus as well as the ability to repeat the course once when topics vary should help to increase enrollment to a more sustainable level than has been the case with RELS 490.

Rationale: The current capstone research course, RELS 490, is no longer sustainable. Although it is a faculty-directed course, it's focused on independent student research and writing rather than student/faculty contact hours. RELS 492 will be a content-oriented course and will offer the same attention to the application of theoretical and methodological approaches to the study of religion as does the current RELS 490, but will otherwise resemble a typical course in terms of regular class meetings and student/faculty contact hours. Extending the seminar from 3 to 4 credit hours will

permit more structured class time to be devoted to developing research projects. Additionally, the topical nature of the course, along with the elimination of a required senior thesis (which will be replaced by a more conventional research project), will open the course to enrollment beyond upper-level majors in Religious Studies – advanced Religious Studies minors, in particular, would be more likely to enroll in a content-driven course than was the case with RELS 490, which was intended only for majors (this is the reason why permission of the instructor is allowable even if students have not taken RELS 398 as a prerequisite). The ability to repeat the course when topics vary will also help ensure that enrollment goals are being met and will allow sections of the course to be offered more than once during the academic year, something we have been unable to do with RELS 490. RELS 490 also mandated that all Religious Studies participate in undergraduate research by the completion of an independent thesis; this likewise proved to be an unsustainable model that diminished the ability of the faculty to mentor those students capable of exceptional research projects. Such advanced students will now be encouraged to complete an undergraduate research project by enrolling in RELS 499.