

THE UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA ASHEVILLE  
FACULTY SENATE

Senate Document Number SD4022S  
Date of Senate Approval 3/31/2022

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Statement of Faculty Senate Action:

**APC Document 35 (RELS):**                    **Add new courses to the Religious Studies curriculum:  
RELS 144, Religion, Death, and Afterlife;  
RELS 145, Sensing Religion: Body, Desire, and Emotion,  
cross-listing the course with ANTH 145;  
RELS 146, Religion and Horror**

**Effective Date: Fall 2022**

**1. Add:** On page 285, new course, **RELS 144, Religion, Death, and Afterlife:**

**144            Religion, Death, and Afterlife (4)**

An introduction to the academic study of religion through examining ideas and practices related to issues of death and concepts of possible afterlife as expressed in various religious traditions as well as popular culture. Among the topics to be examined are religious and philosophical ideas about death and immortality, medical and scientific aspects of death, resurrection and reincarnation, literary journeys into the realms of the afterlife, art and aesthetics, holy figures and bodily relics, paranormal experiences (hauntings, past lives, near death experiences) and portrayals of the undead (e.g., vampires and zombies) in contemporary popular culture. Every other year.

**2a. Add:** On page 285, new course, **RELS 145, Sensing Religion: Body, Desire, and Emotion:**

**145            Sensing Religion: Body, Desire, and Emotion (ANTH 145) (4)**

Introductory course that takes each of the senses as an entry point into how practitioners experience their religious and spiritual lives and what moves them about their relationships and practices with the sacred. This anthropology of religion approach centers the body, as we examine emotion and affect, rather than belief systems or intellectualized arguments. When people sing or chant mantras, cook a meal for an orisha, touch the Torah scroll while dancing, decorate an altar in the colors that please a deity, or engage in visual mandala practice, these activities create intimacy, communal belonging, self-transformation, and other outcomes that defy dominant discourses and provide a lens into why religion really matters to many people. This class invites us to reincorporate our own embodied knowledge as part of the analytical learning process. Every other year.

**2b. Add:** On page 292, new course, **ANTH 145, Sensing Religion: Body, Desire, and Emotion:**

**145 Sensing Religion: Body, Desire, and Emotion (RELS 145) (4)**

Introductory course that takes each of the senses as an entry point into how practitioners experience their religious and spiritual lives and what moves them about their relationships and practices with the sacred. This anthropology of religion approach centers the body, as we examine emotion and affect, rather than belief systems or intellectualized arguments. When people sing or chant mantras, cook a meal for an orisha, touch the Torah scroll while dancing, decorate an altar in the colors that please a deity, or engage in visual mandala practice, these activities create intimacy, communal belonging, self-transformation, and other outcomes that defy dominant discourses and provide a lens into why religion really matters to many people. This class invites us to reincorporate our own embodied knowledge as part of the analytical learning process. Every other year.

**3. Add:** On page 285, new course, **RELS 146, Religion and Horror:**

**146 Religion and Horror (4)**

What is horror in the American cinematic tradition, and why does religion feature so prominently? What is the relationship between religion and horror? What role do difference, race, and the unknown play in the construction of American religious horror? Organized around these framing questions, this introductory course examines the interplay of religion and horror in contemporary American film, giving attention to its seventeenth-century colonial Puritan roots and other formative sources. Grounded in an interdisciplinary religious studies approach, students will engage the above questions through sustained scholarly reflection on contemporary horror films. A principal aim of the course involves honing students' ability to build defensible arguments in conversation with cinematic evidence and other scholars from such fields as history, phenomenology of religion, sociology of religion, psychology of religion, and horror studies. Every other year.

**Impact Statement:** Since these courses are designed to replace the requirement of a single introductory course to the academic study of religion (required for majors and minors), the same impact and rationale statements are applicable to all.

*1. Does the course fulfill a major requirement, LAC requirement, or requirement for another department? If the course fulfills a major requirement, will it be a required course, an additional choice for a course group, or an option for unspecified required hours in the major?*

RELS 144, 145, and 146 will replace the current required RELS 200 gateway course. Any course in the RELS 14X series will now meet the requirement for an introductory gateway course that used to be only RELS 200. In replacing RELS 200 as a required course, these courses will not increase the number of credit hours required for the major and will in fact offer students a larger selection of courses that will appeal to non-majors/minors. Since the topics will differ, students may take additional 14X series courses for elective credit. RELS 145 has already been approved for addition to the Social Science requirement of the LAC and will be cross-listed as ANTH 145.

2. *Information about the courses:*

a. Student Learning Objectives

Although topically organized, each of these courses will meet the requirements for the following departmental SLOs. By the conclusion of any of these courses, students should be able to:

- SLO 1: Identify the distinctions between the academic and theological approaches to the study of religion. (Religious Literacy)
- SLO 2: Define and apply basic concepts to the study of religion. (Religious Literacy)
- SLO 3: Utilize appropriate evidence in the critical analysis of religion. (Critical Thinking)
- SLO 4: Articulate communication effectively in the styles and genres that engage in the academic study of religion. (Written Communication)

b. Anticipated class size

- 15-20 students for each

c. Amount of scheduled class time

- 4 hrs/wk

d. Instructional format

- Lecture and discussion

e. Any specialized space or material needs

- None

f. Contact hours and faculty workload hours

- 4 hrs/week. No faculty workloads will increase or decrease since as with the current RELS 200, we will offer one or more of these courses in rotation every semester.

3. *Information about the number of faculty in the department who will/can teach the proposed course.*

All current members of the faculty can and will teach one of these courses regularly; indeed, all three members of the faculty have offered one of these courses as a Special Topics course at least once.

4. *Information about when and how often the course will be offered. (This is of particular concern for new courses and those that are required for the major.)*

At least one 14X course will be offered every semester.

5. *For new courses or changes to offering patterns, information about how the addition or change affects the ability of the department to deliver its existing curriculum and meet its commitments to the LAC.*

The department has always provided significant support to the Core Humanities Program, and this will not change. Offering a 14X course will be a substitute for the present rotation of offering RELS 200 every semester. As noted, the topical nature of the courses can potentially qualify them for addition to the LAC options.

6. *Is the course part of the UNC Common Numbering System (CNS)? If so, what is the impact of the change to the UNC CNS? If it is a new course, should it be added to the UNC CNS system? The UNC System Office requires all proposed changes to the UNC CNS be submitted by February 15th for the next academic year.*

These courses have no equivalents at the community college level. The rationale for these changes, further explicated below, are designed to address issues with enrollment in RELS courses and the need to attract students to the offerings of the department at an earlier stage in their college career. While each course will address central and significant issues in the academic study of religion, their topical nature – designed to appeal to student interests – make them unsuitable for the CNS.

**Rationale:** At the recommendation of an external reviewer (Spring 2018), our current introductory gateway course, RELS 200, will be replaced by these three topical 100-level introductory courses to boost, potentially, the number of RELS majors and minors and thus lead concomitantly to increased enrollments in upper-division RELS courses. While sharing the same basic consideration of theoretical and methodological approaches to the academic study of religion – as well as a commitment to applied critical thinking – these new gateway courses will reframe such study through contemporary topical lenses according to the expertise of the instructor. Such a topical approach will offer broader appeal to students (as evidenced by enrollments when these courses were offered as special topic courses) than the rather sterile course title of “Introduction to the Study of Religion” (the title for RELS 200). This approach will also help to decenter and decolonize the traditional approaches to the study of religion – developed largely in colonialist and Eurocentric paradigms – and allow for the introduction of more contemporary approaches. RELS 145 has already been approved for addition to the Social Science requirement of the LAC, and we plan to seek other possible LAC designations (e.g., DI, ARTS) for the other courses.