Faith and Reason

Course Specification
Courses in this area will lead students to explore the tension and cohesion between faith traditions and "reason traditions" in the contemporary world from a variety of disciplinary and thematic approaches. Such courses will be largely epistemological in their focus. Courses in the Faith and Reason area will provide students with appropriate intellectual frameworks that would enable them to analyze and evaluate challenges such as these: the nature of faith and its relationship to rationality; the compatibility of religious belief and various scientific traditions; the challenge of religious diversity; the problem of evil; the apparent irrelevance of religious belief in a liberal society governed by secular reason; the easy transition from religious tolerance to religious relativism. These courses will, thus, reflect a foundational commitment of the Roman Catholic tradition, i.e. open engagement with difficult questions concerning both reason and religious belief.

- Students will grapple intellectually with both the tension and cohesion of faith and reason in the contemporary world.
- Students will come to understand, at more than a rudimentary level, some of the deep philosophical and epistemological implications of, and problems for, religious belief and the nature of reason.
- Students will come to understand the importance of reason, and to understand that there needn't be any ultimate inconsistency between faith properly understood and reason.

Submission Materials
Proposals for Faith and Reason certification should include the following details:

(1) The general criterion category or categories listed below (A, B, C) that the proposed course would fulfill and the specific criterion or criteria listed under these categories (e.g., the origins of religious faith claims) that the proposed course would fulfill.

(2) A detailed explanation of how the proposed course would fulfill that specific criterion or criteria listed in (1).

(3) A brief description of the particular conception(s) of faith, of reason, and of the relation between them that would be pursued in the course.

The Criteria
In order to be included in this area a course must satisfy at least one of the following three criteria:

A. The course deals extensively with empirical evidence or rational arguments for and against the existence of God, or for and against a particular theistic religion (i.e., Christianity, Judaism, or Islam). In addition, in the case of empirical evidence, the course includes a sustained and direct discussion of the relevance of these findings to the existence of God or truth of a particular theistic religion.
Examples of topics which, if covered in the way prescribed, would qualify:

- Discussion of any of the so-called “traditional” arguments for the existence of God, such as those found in Thomas Aquinas
- Discussion of design arguments with evidence from cosmology or biology
- Discussion of the reality of miracles
- Discussion of the significance of religious experiences, the problem of their veridicality, and the problem of their interpretation
- Discussion of rational arguments concerning the existence of God based on suffering
- Discussion of arguments concerning the truth claims of a particular religion based on the fact of religious diversity
- Arguments concerning testimonial evidence
- Discussion of the theological implications of hermeneutical, archeological, and/or critical historical methods as applied to biblical texts and the relation of such methods and their findings to belief and faith
- Discussion of the epistemological questions underlying the task of scriptural interpretation

Examples of existing SJU courses that serve as paradigms for satisfaction of criterion (A):

- PHL 356  Religious Diversity
- PHL 359  Defending the Divine, from Enlightenment to Idealism
- PHL 354  Philosophy of Religion
- PHL 353  Philosophy, Science, and Religion
- PHL 358  Contemporary Atheism and the Problem of God
- PSY xxx  Psychology of Religion
- THE 348  Theology and Science
- THE 345  Evil as a Theological Problem

B. The course deals extensively with the internal logical coherence of theism or of the body of theological doctrines associated with a particular theistic religion (i.e., Christianity, Judaism, or Islam).

Examples of topics which, if covered in the way prescribed, would qualify:

- Discussion of arguments concerning the internal coherence of the traditional properties of God, and of the coherence of these properties with claims about human nature such as free will.
- Discussion of arguments about the logical consistency of the Trinity.
- Discussion of whether God’s goodness is compatible with theories of salvation and/or damnation.

Examples of SJU courses that serve as paradigms for satisfaction of criterion (B):

- PHL 357/THE 342  Uses and Abuses of Jesus in Modernity
- PHL 350  God in Recent Philosophy
- PHL 356  Philosophical Issues In Christian Doctrine
C. The course deals extensively with topics such as the nature of faith and its relationship to rationality; the origins of religious faith claims (e.g., divine revelation, reason, etc.); the comparative analysis of various ways of knowing (e.g., the mystical, the rational, the emotional, the scientific etc.) and how these are manifested or how they collide in our contemporary world; the kinds of truth claims that arise from various ways of knowing; potential measures of the veracity of these truth claims.

Examples of topics which, if covered in the way prescribed, would qualify:

- An examination of Soren Kierkegaard's discussion of religious faith and evidence;
- A critical analysis of classical Catholic and/or classical Protestant approaches to the rationality of faith;
- A discussion of the views of those in the Reformed tradition of Protestantism, which de-emphasize the importance of having evidence or reasons for belief in God;
- A critical investigation of the challenges brought to the epistemological presuppositions of modern Roman Catholic and Protestant theologies and their faith claims by the emergence of liberation theologies, including but not limited to feminist theologies, Latin American liberation theologies, and black theologies.

Examples of SJU courses that serve as paradigms for satisfaction of criterion (C):

- PHL 359 Defending the Divine, from Enlightenment to Idealism
- PHL 356 Religious Diversity
- PHL 357/THE 342 Uses and Abuses of Jesus in Modernity
- PHL 351 Reason, Faith, and Relativism
- PHL 354 Philosophy of Religion
- PHL 352 Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, and Dostoyevsky
- PHL 358 Contemporary Atheism and the Problem of God
- PHL 353 Philosophy, Science, and Religion
- PHL 350 God in Recent Philosophy
- PSY xxx Psychology of Religion
- THE 333 Knowledge and Love of God in the Middle Ages
- THE 348 Theology and Science
- THE 345 Evil as a Theological Problem
- THE 356 Liberation and Political Theologies
- THE 357 Feminist Theologies

**Rationale for inclusion in the GEP**

Saint Joseph’s University “espouses the educational priorities of the Society of Jesus which include searching for God in all things…”. What are the greatest challenges that our students face in terms of their search for God? And how do we prepare them to deal with these challenges, both during their undergraduate years and throughout their lives? Among those challenges: progressive immersion
in a secular world from which God appears to be entirely absent; dealing with claims made by “secular reason” that suggest that religious faith is irrational or merely an “enabling mechanism for survival,” or is incompatible with a 21st Century scientific outlook; experiences with evil and the suffering of the innocent, which many will inevitably face as they move toward and through adulthood; and living in and creating families in which different faith traditions are present, which suggest an easy transition from religious tolerance to religious relativism. In short, they face the challenge that faith in God is irrational, is opposed to science, is irrelevant in a liberal democratic society, and is bankrupt in the face of suffering. Courses in the Faith and Reason area will provide students with appropriate intellectual frameworks enabling them to analyze and evaluate challenges such as these.

**Explanation and Motivation for the Criteria**

When students emerge from their education at Saint Joseph’s they will face challenges to faith posed by a scientific worldview as well as by the problems of evil, widespread suffering, and religious diversity. They will have to negotiate a society governed by secular reason in which faith is often seen as irrational and irrelevant. If they are believers they may be challenged to defend the logical coherence of theistic religious claims. They will be called upon to make decisions as to what kinds of evidence for or against faith they will accept as persuasive. A course in the area of Faith and Reason should at least begin to prepare them to engage with these contemporary debates about religious claims in an intelligent and informed manner, with appropriate critical appreciation for the methodological assumptions made by the participants. In this spirit we specify the following criteria for inclusion of courses in the area.