

DEPARTMENT OF THEOLOGY AND FRANCISCAN STUDIES

Department Chair: Joshua C. Benson, Ph.D.

Faculty

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The academic study of theology aims to investigate the nature of God and interpret various dimensions of human religious experience.

Theology studies what people believe about God and the fundamental nature of reality and why they hold those beliefs.

Theology examines what people do in religious groups and institutions to express their beliefs.

Theology examines what motivates people to adopt a religious outlook on life.

Theology studies the past with a view to understanding its influence on the present and the future.

Students who take courses in theology can expect to learn more about the beliefs, values, and practices of religious people around the world, with special attention to the Christian tradition. Some theology courses focus on a particular theological theme or issue that has been debated by scholars over the centuries, while others explore the role of religion in contemporary society or examine the relation between religion and other realms of thought (science, philosophy, art, etc.). In the midst of this diversity, one concern remains paramount: to equip students with intellectual concepts and methods to enable them to think carefully and systematically about the ultimate questions of life in the company of others who have explored these questions before them.

- Theology, BA (<https://catalog.sbu.edu/undergraduate/arts-sciences/theology/theology-ba>)
- Theology, Minor (<https://catalog.sbu.edu/undergraduate/arts-sciences/theology/theology-minor>)

Theology and Franciscan Studies (THFS)

THFS-101 THE WAY OF FRANCIS & CLARE (3 Credits)

This course is intended to introduce students to the Franciscan roots that underlie the mission and values of St. Bonaventure University. After familiarizing themselves with the social and cultural context that shaped Francis and Clare of Assisi, students will examine their lives, values and spirituality, and then study how these achieved systematic theological expression in the thought of St. Bonaventure. Students will then connect and apply key Franciscan insights to contemporary concerns.

THFS-104 THE WAY OF FRANCIS & CLARE HONORS (3 Credits)

This course is designed for students in the honors Program. It achieves the same objectives and satisfies the same requirements as does THFS 101 "The Way of Francis and Clare". An honors section is distinguished from a regular section by more than just the addition of an extra paper. At the discretion of the instructor, Honors courses typically do one or more of the following: cover additional topics, cover topics in more depth, and/or require additional scholarly assignments as compared to a regular section.

THFS-200 COMPARATIVE RELIGION (221) (3 Credits)

Among the many questions that confront the student of religion today, the most challenging is religious pluralism. There are several questions that must be dealt with here: Do we study other religions merely to satisfy our curiosity, or is there a deeper dimension to this effort? Is it possible that our faith might be deepened by an awareness of the spirituality expressed in other religions, or does such an awareness shake our faith to its foundations? This course takes a close look at these and similar questions and attempts to find meaningful answers and responses. The course also examines key aspects of various world religions in an effort to reach a deeper appreciation of the spirituality of humankind.

THFS-203 ISLAM: RELIGION & CULTURE (3 Credits)

This course examines the world's second largest religion according to its three major dimensions, namely, Islam (practices), Iman (faith), and Ihsan (integration and expression), as well as a historical dimension. Topics include the social and religious climate in pre-Islamic Arabia and the eastern Mediterranean, the life of the Prophet Muhammad, the history of the Islamic community, and the beliefs, practices, and spirituality of Islam. The culture of Islam, as expressed by the arts, will also be examined. Contemporary social and political issues that face the international Muslim community are also considered.

THFS-205 MYTH AND CULTURE (3 Credits)

Why do myths play such an important role in human culture? This course introduces students to a variety of methods for understanding the role of myths in religious communities and in modern secular culture. The build of the course is devoted to an examination of the major classical and contemporary theories of the meaning and interpretation of myths (anthropological, structuralist, psychoanalytical, etc.), with examples drawn from a variety of cultures both ancient and modern.

THFS-222 RELIGION AND POLITICS (3 Credits)

Should religion be kept out of politics, or does religion have a vital role to play in political life? This course explores the influence of religion in American politics from the Plymouth Fathers to the present, with special attention to the contemporary scene. Issues to be considered include the changing place of religion in American political history, the meaning and interpretation of the religion clause of the First Amendment, the tensions between majority and minority religious and political ideologies in America, the secularist impulse in American political life, and the rise of the "Religious Right."

THFS-228 RELIGION AND FILM (3 Credits)

Religious films and films with religious themes have been around since the beginning of the cinema industry. This course will look at examples of film art that also fit into the category of religious film. Films are chosen for their value in addressing broad religious topics, not just because they carry a religious theme. Topics that might be covered include devils and angels, Jesus films, religious life, saints, and being Catholic.

THFS-230 FAITH AND DOUBT (3 Credits)

Modern secular culture has raised many questions for religious faith. Traditional views of God have been challenged from a variety of directions, and the idea that one should submit one's life to a higher power runs counter to contemporary ideas about human freedom and psychological well-being. This course will examine recent critiques of belief in God and the nature of faith in order to clarify what might be required of an intelligent faith in God today.

THFS-245 CHRISTIAN ETHICS (3 Credits)

What does it mean to think and live as a Christian in today's world? How does one decide? This course will explore some of the answers that Christian thinkers have given to such questions. The investigation will include an examination of selected moral and theological problems such as abortion, poverty, war and racism.

THFS-252 CHRISTIAN SPIRITUALITY (3 Credits)

Judaism, Christianity and Islam share a common spiritual heritage, but each religion has developed its own unique understanding of the way humans should approach and experience God. This course examines the mystical traditions and practices of Judaism, Christianity and Islam as expressed in their Scriptures and the writings of later spiritual leaders.

THFS-255 PRAYER: A CONTEMPLATIVE THEOLOGICAL INQ (1 Credit)

This course deals with the philosophical possibility and theologically claimed reality of a relationship (prayer) with the Mystery that is referred to with the word "God." After consideration of relevant fundamental theological reflections it will consider the nature of prayer, contemplative prayer, Franciscan prayer and prayer in the light of evil and suffering. A visit to the Mt. Irenaeus Franciscan contemplative community is offered as a co-curricular activity of the course.

THFS-257 SPIRITUALITY AND AGING (3 Credits)

This course examines how spirituality, religiosity and faith are vital aspects (or not) of the lives of the elderly in America. Key questions are: how is 'spirituality' differentiated from 'faith' or 'religiosity'? How is aging to be understood in respect to religious traditions? Is aging itself a spiritual/religious process? Can there be non-religious as well as religious forms of spirituality? How is gender related to aging and spirituality? Are their 'natural' limits to human life from a religious/ spiritual perspective, and if so what do they say to the medical-technological drives to extend human life indefinitely? How does the allocation of medical resources to the care of the elderly raise questions of social justice with the Catholic tradition and more widely? How do views of an afterlife affect care for and communication with the elderly?

THFS-261 JESUS THROUGH THE CENTURIES (3 Credits)

Jesus of Nazareth is not only the theological center of the Christian faith, but also the pivotal figure in the history of Western civilization. Debates over who he was and what he sought to accomplish have engaged the best minds of generations, and conflicts over these questions have divided nations and led to bloodshed. This course will explore the diverse and sometimes opposing views that Christians have held about Jesus over the centuries.

THFS-263 SACRAMENTS (3 Credits)

What is a sacrament? Why are sacraments so important in the spiritual life of the church? This course examines the theological basis of the sacramental system and presents a survey of the sacraments as celebrated in Christian churches. Included in the course is a study of symbols, rituals and the psychosocial dynamics of sacramental celebration.

THFS-264 AMERICAN CATHOLICISM (3 Credits)

The Roman Catholic Church is the largest religious institution in America. Yet for much of its history the American Catholic community has struggled to find its place in a predominantly Protestant (and often hostile) culture. This course offers an overview of the theological and historical development of American Catholicism as a specific expression of the Roman Catholic Church that has been molded in a unique way by American culture.

THFS-265 GLOBAL CATHOLICISM (3 Credits)

This course explores the different forms that the Catholic church has taken as it has adapted to diverse cultures around the world and attempts to unpack the idea of "catholicity" for our contemporary time. It introduces the student to a variety of issues facing Catholic Christians that arise in the contemporary context of globalization. Contemporary sensitivity to the categories of culture, identity, and location is responsible for a vital creativity evident in contributions by various current Catholic thinkers and theologians.

THFS-266 FRANCISCAN THEOLOGY FOR TODAY (3 Credits)

Is Franciscan Theology still relevant today? The course will examine such Franciscan theologians as Alexander of Hales, Bonaventure, Duns Scotus, Peter John Olivi and others in comparison with modern and contemporary theology and philosophy to answer the following questions from a Franciscan perspective: Is theology a true science? How do we prove God's existence? What is the role of the senses and the arts in becoming aware of God? How does the human mind reflect God? How does the will relate to the intellect? How should humans relate to one another socio-economically? What is God and how is God related to the physical world? How does the Trinity make any sense? Why do we need a mystical journey as well as rational?

THFS-270 INTRO TO THE BIBLE (3 Credits)

The Bible is a collection of books that both Jews and Christians honor as sacred Scripture, though in different ways. This course will introduce students to the historical, literary, and theological dimensions of the Bible as it has been understood by modern academic scholars and by Jews and Christians over the centuries.

THFS-271 UNDERSTANDING THE OLD TESTAMENT (3 Credits)

The collection of books that Christians call the "Old Testament," the first part of the Christian Bible, is also the sacred scripture of Judaism. It originated, however, before either of these religions, as a written reflection of the religious beliefs, practices, and ideals of a particular group of people in ancient Israel whom both Jews and Christians claim as their intellectual and spiritual ancestors. This course will explore the contents and message of these books in relation to their historical, literary, and theological contexts as both sacred literature of ancient Israel and canonical scriptures of Judaism and Christianity.

THFS-272 UNDERSTANDING THE NEW TESTAMENT (3 Credits)

The collection of books that Christians call the "New Testament," is the most important part of the Bible for Christians. It was written during the early decades of the Christian movement and serves as our principal source for information about the life and ministry of Jesus and the early history of the Christian church, including the rise of Christian theology. This course will investigate the contents and messages of the 27 books of the New Testament in relation to their historical, literary, and theological contexts in both the early Christian community and later Christian interpretations.

THFS-285 GLOBAL CATHOLICISM (3 Credits)

This course explores the different forms that the Catholic church has taken as it has adapted to diverse cultures around the world and attempts to unpack the idea of "catholicity" for our contemporary time. It introduces the student to a variety of issues facing Catholic Christians that arise in the contemporary context of globalization. Contemporary sensitivity to the categories of culture, identity, and location is responsible for a vital creativity evident in contributions by various current Catholic thinkers and theologians. 3 credits.

THFS-299 SPECIAL TOPICS (3 Credits)

An intensive study of a topic or issue not usually addressed in other courses offered by the department. The topic of the course will be advertised in the course schedule prior to the semester when it is offered. The course may be taken more than once provided the content has changed.

THFS-304 RELIGION AND GENDER (3 Credits)

Religion has played a key role in defining society's understanding of women and the roles that women have been allowed to play across the centuries. This course examines how women have been viewed and treated in the major religious traditions. Special attention is given to feminist critiques of traditional religion and the struggles of women to take control of their own religious destinies.

Prerequisite(s): Take THEO-100

THFS-307 CHRISTIAN-MUSLIM REL: PAST, PRES, FUT (3 Credits)

This course examines the historical, social and theological dimensions of Christian-Muslim relations from the advent of Islam to the current day. The first part of the course addresses questions such as: How have Christians and Muslims viewed each others' faiths over the centuries? To what extent have their relations been characterized by harmony and cooperation, or by strife and discord? How have these relations changed and why? In the second part, we examine contemporary theological questions, perspectives, and debates arising from this historical interaction. We will also address inter-religious dialogue in the United States, and the future of Christian-Muslim relations.

Prerequisite(s): Take THEO-203

THFS-313 RELIGIONS OF SOUTH ASIA (3 Credits)

This course is an introduction to the religions of South Asia (modern day Pakistan, India and Bangladesh), specifically the indigenous Indic traditions of Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, and Sikhism, as well as those non-indigenous religions that developed a significant presence and unique expression in South Asia, namely Christianity and Islam. In addition to exploring the beliefs, customs, sacred texts, and visual cultures of these traditions, this course addresses the interaction between these faith communities both historically and currently.

THFS-320 FRANCISCAN APPROACH TO HEALTH CARE (3 Credits)

The course will teach how to look from a Franciscan perspective on the US health care system and compare with other models of health care in the past and abroad. The overall goal of the course will be to see the reality of health care in the U.S. and see how we can improve on this through the use of Franciscan values and virtues such as compassion and service.

Corequisite(s): TAKE THFS-101

THFS-323 RELIGION AND SCIENCE (3 Credits)

Do science and religion offer competing or complementary understandings of the material world? This course explores the historic and contemporary relation between scientific and religious views of reality. Issues to be addressed include the origins of the universe ("Big Bang" cosmology), the nature of the physical universe (quantum mechanics, chaos theory), the origins of humanity (evolutionary theory), and the basis for moral conduct (sociobiology).

THFS-324 RELIGION AND RACE (3 Credits)

Religion has played a key role in the development and support of racist beliefs, attitudes and institutions in the Western world. But religion has also been a powerful tool for combating racism. This course will examine both sides of this troubling aspect of the Western religious history, with special attention to groups like the Ku Klux Klan and Black Muslims that explicitly link race and religion. Substantial attention will also be given to current scientific and sociological thinking on the subject of the race.

THFS-325 RELIGION AND ART (3 Credits)

The arts have been an important channel of religious expression from the ancient cave dwellers to the present. This course examines the role played by the arts in the Christian tradition and the modern secular world. The first part of the course focuses on the varied uses of music, painting, sculpture, etc., in the life and liturgy of the church, including theological interpretations on the role of art in liturgy. The second part examines the spiritual power of contemporary secular forms of art.

THFS-326 Religion and Science Fiction (3 Credits)

Science Fiction is one of the most popular entertainment genres today. Good SciFi movies or books project from the present to the future, thus not just revealing hidden utopian or dystopian expectations but also the cultural values of the time they were produced in. In addition, many SciFi works have a hidden eschatology. In this class, we will reveal those hidden religious metaphors and compare them with the theories and dogmas of Christian and Jewish theologians. We will explore such fundamental religious questions as what does it mean to be human, what is the ultimate nature of the universe, and theodicy. In addition to class we will meet once weekly to watch SciFi movies.

THFS-327 RELIGION AND TERRORISM (3 Credits)

The September 11, 2001 attacks on the World Trade Center buildings in New York City and the ensuing "war on terror" have heightened public awareness of the often close link between religion and violence. This course will explore the complex and disturbing relationships between religion and violence. This course will explore the complex and disturbing relationship between religion and violence in various religious traditions. Primary attention will be given to the actions of non-governmental entities, but the course will also look at ways in which governments have used religious arguments to support acts of violence. The course will also examine ways in which religion might be sued to reduce the amount and severity of religious and political violence in the contemporary world.

THFS-333 Christian Marriage REFORMATION (3 Credits)

A study of sexuality, spirituality and the sacrament of marriage. Utilizing experiential and historical data and a Catholic and Franciscan theological perspective, we will explore myths, realities and meanings of eros, sexuality, relational dynamics, intimacy, pornography, beauty, dating, marriage, sex, divorce, annulment, conflict resolution, commitment, parenting and spirituality. To achieve this goal, required reading, critical reflection and active class participation are essential.

THFS-333T Contemporary Catholic Thought (3 Credits)

The 20th century was arguably the most creative period in Catholic thought since the era of the great scholastic theologians of the Middle Ages. As it enters its third millennium, Catholic theology is marked by a many-faceted richness and vitality. This course investigates the central ideas and concerns of key twentieth century thinkers who have shaped the understanding of Catholic faith within contemporary cultures.

THFS-340 Ethical Leadership: Franciscan Values FRANCISCAN PERSPECTIVE (3 Credits)

This course focuses on a healthy world, economy and our responsibility for it. It begins with the economic financial crisis of 2007-2008 and looks at the social, cultural, economic and psychological factors along with the ethical lapses that led up to it. This course then presents the major contributions that Franciscan thinkers have made to the way we can understand, accept and humanize the modern market economy. Franciscan principles and practices for a more social economy will provide students with the ethical insights and practical tools they will need in the workplace to balance freedom and responsibility, profit-making and solidarity, the care of creation and the common good.

THFS-345 CATHOLIC SOCIAL THOUGHT (3 Credits)

The course will introduce students to what has been called the greatest secret of the Catholic Church- its social teaching. Students will begin by exploring the historical and religious origins of the basic principles of Catholic Social Thought-the sacredness of human life, and the dignity of the human person. They will learn how that teaching has been articulated in Church documents, and has found expression in the Church and in secular movements. Ultimately, the course is not just another academic offering, but an integral part of the mission of the University. It is a key component of the University's response to the Church's call for a fuller integration of the Church's social tradition into the mainstream of Catholic education. The course will help demonstrate the University's commitment to human life, human dignity, and human rights.

Prerequisite(s): Take CLAR-106 CLAR-107

THFS-348 HEALTH, FAITH & ETHICS (3 Credits)

This course introduces students to and acquaints them with the ways in which religious convictions and practices shape understandings of health and wholeness and, concomitantly, how health care should be administered to all in a just, right and equitable manner as people created in God's image. Questions of social justice and allocation of limited resources, especially to vulnerable populations like the elderly and the poor are considered. Specific ethical issues are treated within the purview of a spiritual/religious vision of human beings.

THFS-349 ISSUES IN CHRISTIAN ETHICS (3 Credits)

This course will examine how Christian ethical principles can be used to analyze a particular ethical problem. The content of the course will be announced in the course schedule prior to the semester when it is offered. The course may be taken more than once provided the content has changed.

THFS-357 MERTON'S HEART: JOURNEY & THOUGHT (3 Credits)

Thomas Merton, a one-time faculty member at St. Bonaventure, was one of the most influential spiritual writers of this century. This course takes students on a journey through the life and writings of Thomas Merton. The course includes an analysis of Merton's theological reflections on comparative religious experience and his prophetic approach to social problems that arose out of his contemplative awareness.

THFS-359 FRANCISCAN SPIRITUALITY (3 Credits)

The Franciscan movement has given rise to a distinctive spirituality, a whole way of approaching life. This course will first focus on the religious experience of Francis and Clare of Assisi as seen in their life choices and writings. We will examine their distinctive vision of God, creation, and human relationships, and the ways these insights were developed by later authors. Then, key features of the "life according to Gospel" which they fashioned will be examined, and finally, we will bring Franciscan spirituality to bear on issues in contemporary society.

Corequisite(s): CLAR-207 OR FS/THEO-101

THFS-359T STY IN SPIRITUAL TRADITIONS (3 Credits)

An intensive study of a particular issue or thinker in historic or contemporary spirituality. The topic of the course will be advertised in the course schedule prior to the semester when it is offered. The course may be taken more than once provided the content has changed.

THFS-360 Early History of Christianity to the REFORMATION (3 Credits)

For much of the last 2,000 years, the history of Western civilization has been framed around the history of the Christian church. This course surveys the history of Christianity from the Apostolic Fathers to the Modern Era. Attention will be given to the social, institutional and intellectual aspects of the Christian faith.

THFS-362 FRANCIS & FRANC. TRADITION (3 Credits)

The spiritual movement initiated by Francis of Assisi has played a key role in the spiritual and intellectual life of the Catholic church from the Middle Ages to the present. This course will examine the life of St. Francis and his impact on the church and the world. The course will also look at some of the great Franciscan scholars like St. Bonaventure in order to explore the influence and applications of Franciscanism to the modern world.

THFS-366 FRANCISCAN THEOLOGY FOR TODAY (3 Credits)

Is Franciscan Theology still relevant today? The course will examine such Franciscan theologians as Alexander of Hales, Bonaventure, Duns Scotus and Peter John Olivi in comparison with modern and contemporary theology and philosophy to answer the following questions from a Franciscan perspective: Is theology a true science? What is God and how is God related to the world? How does the Trinity make any sense? What's so special about the person of Christ? What is more important to us: the will or the intellect? What does the Holy Spirit have to do with history? What does theology have to do with socio-economics? The course will be based around discussions of most interesting topics and will feature several guest speakers.

THFS-368 BODY, SEX AND SACRAMENT (3 Credits)

The Christian tradition has always been uncomfortable discussing issues pertaining to the body and sexuality. Why would this be? This course examines the reasons for this discomfort and offers a more positive assessment of "embodiment" as a vital aspect of Christian theology and spirituality. The course will include a constructive interpretation of Catholic teachings about ritual and sacraments, the incarnation of Jesus and human sexuality.

THFS-374 WOMEN AND THE BIBLE (3 Credits)

The Bible was written by, for, and about men. As a result, it reflects the ideas, judgments, and world views of men. This course examines how this male-centered perspective affects the way women are portrayed (or more often ignored) throughout the biblical record. The contributions of women to the social and religious life of ancient Israel and the early Christian church are regularly downplayed in these writings, and negative images and stereotypes of women abound. The few women who are honored for their accomplishments are notable exceptions to the rule.

THFS-382 RELIGIOUS EDUCATION (3 Credits)

Educational theories have sparked a variety of approaches that have been applied to the ministry of religious education. This course explores some of the key theoretical models of religious education and evaluates the strengths and weaknesses of each approach. This course, while exploring some of the key theoretical models of religious education, will focus substantially on pastoral experience, and how the model of religious education in pastoral situations is more a collection of approaches than merely one type of approach.

THFS-385 SPECIAL STUDIES IN RELIGIOUS EDUCATION (3 Credits)

An intensive study of a topic or issue pertaining to religious education. The topic of the course will be advertised in the course schedule prior to the semester when it is offered. The course may be taken more than once provided the content has changed.

THFS-399 SPECIAL TOPICS (3 Credits)

As intensive study of a topic or issue not usually addressed in other courses offered by the department. The topic of the course will be advertised in the course schedule prior to the semester when it is offered. The course may be taken again provided the content has changed.

THFS-430 THEOLOGICAL METHOD (3 Credits)

Contemporary theologians use a variety of methods as they seek to conceptualize and communicate the Christian faith in an increasingly pluralistic world. This course will survey a variety of contemporary approaches to theological reasoning through an examination of key themes and issues.

Corequisite(s): CLAR-206 AND CLAR-207

Restrictions: RGC.105

THFS-440 CONTEMPORARY MORAL THEOLOGY (3 Credits)

Debates over moral and ethical issues have become increasingly complex with the rise of modern science, the gradual secularization and diversification of Western culture, and the "turn to the subject" in modern thought. Christian ethicists have had to develop new ways of thinking about moral issues and moral agency in light of these challenges. This course looks at some of the conceptual problems associated with the practice of moral theology in the contemporary world and investigates some of the ways in which Christian moral theologians have sought to address these challenges.

Corequisite(s): CLAR-206 & CLAR-207

Restrictions: RGC.105

THFS-460 HIST. OF CHRISTIANITY (3 Credits)

For much of the last 2,000 years, the history of Western civilization has been framed around the history of the Christian church. This course surveys the history of Christianity from the Apostolic Fathers to the Modern Era. Attention will be given to the social, institutional and intellectual aspects of the Christian faith.

Corequisite(s): TAKE CLAR-106 AND CLAR-107

Restrictions: RGC.105

THFS-470 CONTEMP BIBLICAL INTERPRET (3 Credits)

Theologians and biblical scholars have subjected the Bible to rigorous critical investigation since the rise of the historical-critical method in the 18th century. This course examines the tools and methods used by contemporary scholars in their studies of the Bible, with an emphasis on more recent developments. Students will learn to use the tools and methods of modern scholarship through the study of selected texts from the Hebrew Bible and Christian Scriptures.

Corequisite(s): TAKE CLAR-206 AND CLAR-207

Restrictions: RGC.105

THFS-490 IND.STY:READINGS IN THEOLOGY (1-6 Credits)

Under the guidance of a professor, the student will pursue an advanced research project that involves significant reading and writing.

THFS-490A IND ST: INTRO TO FRAN ECONOM (1-6 Credits)

Under the guidance of a professor, the student will pursue an advanced research project that involves significant reading and writing.

THFS-491 READINGS IN THEOLOGY (1-6 Credits)

Under the guidance of a professor, the student will pursue an advanced research project that involves significant reading and writing.

THFS-495 REL. EXPER. OF THOMAS MERTON (3 Credits)

Students may earn academic credit while working in a religious organization under the supervision of both a religious organization under the supervision of both an on-site director and a faculty member who will assign and evaluate reading and writing assignments appropriate to the experience. Students are responsible for arranging their own internships in advance of the semester for which academic credit is sought. All internships must be approved by the department.

Restrictions: RGC.105

THFS-498 SEMINAR IN THEOLOGY (3 Credits)

An integrative capstone course for theology majors and minors. The course will explore a particular topic, theme, issue or author from a variety of theological perspectives. The topic of course will be advertised in the course schedule prior to the semester when it is offered. The course is required of all senior theology majors.