

PROPOSAL FOR A CERTIFICATE PROGRAM

Date: November 17, 2025

School/College/Unit: Franklin College of Arts and Sciences; School of Public and International Affairs

Department/Division: Religion; International Affairs; Political Science

Certificate Title: Religion and Politics

Effective Term: Fall 2026

Which campuses will offer this certificate? Athens

Level (Undergraduate, Graduate, or Post-Baccalaureate): Undergraduate

Program Abstract: This certificate program will advance undergraduate students' understanding of the complex and dynamic interactions among religion, religious institutions, political values, and political systems in the United States and in international and global contexts. The curriculum considers humanistic and social scientific vantage points on the nexus of religion in politics, as well as politics in religion. This program of study deepens students' understanding of both the historical and contemporary contexts where faith, moral reasoning, and politics interact and shape societal and governance institutions.

1. Purpose and Educational Objectives

State the purpose and educational objectives of the program. How does this program complement the mission of the institution?

Both historically and in modern society, religious movements, identities, and faith-based institutions significantly influence policy decisions, international conflict and cooperation, and domestic political mobilization. Legal and political institutions that regulate the role of religion in politics have proven dynamic throughout history and across political systems. At the same time, some scholars suggest that Western late modernity is now entering a post-secular moment that warrants increased scholarly attention to religion's persistence and apparent re-emergence in public. The proposed certificate connects the study of religion and politics for students who seek to clarify, historically and in contemporary context, how religion affects politics and policymaking, and who wish to develop awareness of political phenomena in religious institutions. The proposed certificate will also provide greater opportunities for collaboration between undergraduate students and faculty researching areas like religion in American politics (e.g., POLS 4690), global Christianity (e.g., RELI 3004), and nationalism and ethnic conflict (e.g., INTL 4280).

2. Need for the Program

While political science, international affairs, and religious studies are popular majors, few undergraduate offerings provide interdisciplinary approaches for interpreting the role of religion in public life. The opportunity for a certificate that integrates politics and religion is particularly timely. Consider that, with increasing frequency, political leaders invoke faith-based and religious values and exhortations in formal discourse and even in policymaking. In recent years, courts, including the U.S. Supreme Court, have made decisions involving religious practice and public life that have reset the boundaries between government, governance, and faith. Political organizations with overt religious identities are among key voting blocs courted by politicians from diverse ideological backgrounds and traditions. These political-religious phenomena are present in the United States but also in other populous democracies such as India and Indonesia, in many Latin American countries, in Africa, the Middle East, and increasingly, in Europe. In sum, religious actors and ideas increasingly influence political preferences, policy formation, judicial interpretation and decisions, and even international and global-scale engagement and relations.

Students in the Undergraduate Certificate in Religion and Politics will be equipped to understand these dynamics more intentionally than through a topical or ad hoc approach found in any single discipline at UGA. The certificate equips students with the skills needed to pursue a variety of careers directly and indirectly related to religion and politics, including, but not limited to: local government administrator, elected official, political lobbyist, diplomat or foreign service officer, armed forces officer, international humanitarian or aid worker, lawyer, reporter or journalist, non-governmental organization (NGO) director or employee, faith-based non-governmental organization (FBO) director or employee, public relations or fundraising manager, religious institutional leader, social and community service manager, or community organizer.

Specifically, the Bureau of Labor Statistics projects the following job growth numbers from 2024 to 2034: 6% for social and community service managers, including directors and employees in local government or the nonprofit sector,¹ 5% for public relations managers, including lobbyists and fundraisers,² and 4% for lawyers.³ In addition, a variety of sources have called for professionals, in different organizational settings, to develop awareness of the influence of religious views in government and law and have promoted “religious literacy” as important for bridging differences in government and business.^{4,5}

- a. Semester/Year of Program Initiation:** Fall 2026
- b. Semester/Year of Full Implementation of Program:** Fall 2026
- c. Semester/Year First Certificates will be awarded:** Fall 2027
- d. Annual Number of Graduates Expected:** 20-30

¹ <https://www.bls.gov/ooh/management/social-and-community-service-managers.htm>

² <https://www.bls.gov/ooh/management/public-relations-managers.htm>

³ <https://www.bls.gov/ooh/legal/lawyers.htm>

⁴ <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/religionglobalsociety/2023/11/for-god-and-country-the-role-of-faith-in-us-electoral-politics-revisited/>

⁵ <https://rpl.hds.harvard.edu/programs/religious-literacy-professions>

e. Projected Future Trends for Number of Students Enrolled in the Program: 30-40

Considering that virtually all the courses in the program already exist, it is expected that the program can scale-up as more students enroll in the certificate and/or additional sections of existing courses may be offered with current faculty resources.

3. Student Demand

a. Provide documentation of evidence of student demand for this program, which may include a student survey.

Primary student demand is expected from students majoring or minoring in the Departments of Religion, Political Science, and International Affairs. A survey was administered to determine interest among Religion, Political Science, and International Affairs majors and minors in Fall 2025. One hundred and eighty-eight students completed the survey. In response to the question, “A program in Religion and Politics would be a valuable certificate option for undergraduate students at the University of Georgia,” 93.6 percent of respondents marked either “strongly agree” or “agree” (with 68.1 percent marking “strongly agree”). In response to the question, “If I had room available to add a certificate program, I would consider adding a Certificate in Religion and Politics,” 83.1 percent marked either “strongly agree” or “agree” (with 57.1 percent marking “strongly agree”). Clearly, survey respondents showed strong interest in the prospective certificate. The faculty believe that the interplay between religion and politics is of interest broadly and will also draw students from majors beyond Religion, Political Science, and International Affairs – and indeed, beyond Franklin College and SPIA.

b. Provide evidence that demand will be sufficient to sustain reasonable enrollment.

In addition to the results of the survey of students conducted in the fall of 2025, sustained student interest in Religion (RELI), International Affairs (INTL), and Political Science (POLS) courses that touch upon the intersection of religion and politics suggests latent demand. Courses such as POLS 4690, Religion and American Politics, and RELI 4300/6300, Islam and Its World, are popular, indicating that social science and humanities students recognize the value of studying the intersection of faith, moral reasoning, and politics. Students pursuing careers in diplomacy, law, and public administration are increasingly aware that an understanding of diverse religious traditions is valuable in professional fields such as non-profit management, community organizing and outreach, local government administration, lobbying, and foreign service. Meanwhile, students who are considering work in faith-based settings can gain from understanding how claims to legitimacy and authority shape religious institutions and empower those institutions in the arenas of government and governance.

4. Program of Study

Courses and Curriculum: Students must complete 5 courses from the approved list below to reach a total of at least 15 hours. The requirements for the certificate are based on course prefixes to ensure an interdisciplinary experience. At least two courses (6 hours) must come from the

RELI prefix. At least two additional courses (6 hours) must come from the INTL and/or POLS prefixes. The fifth course may be fulfilled by RELI(POLS)(INTL) 4699, Religion and Politics Internship, or another course (3 hours) from the list of INTL, POLS, or RELI prefix courses.

INTL 3300, Introduction to Comparative Politics (3 hours)

INTL(AFST) 4280, Nationalism and Ethnic Conflict (3 hours)

INTL 4335, Far Right Politics in Western Democracies (3 hours)

INTL 4370, Middle East Politics (3 hours)

INTL 4371, Israeli Politics (3 hours)

INTL 4455, Violent Political Conflict (3 hours)

INTL 4960R, Faculty-Mentored Undergraduate Research I (1-6 hours)

INTL 4970R, Faculty-Mentored Undergraduate Research II (1-6 hours)

INTL 4980R, Faculty-Mentored Undergraduate Research III (1-6 hours)

INTL 4990R, Undergraduate Research Thesis (or Final Project) (1-6 hours)

POLS 3000, Introduction to Political Theory (3 hours)

POLS 4645E, Applied Civic Engagement – Service Learning (3 hours)

POLS 4690, Religion and American Politics (3 hours)

POLS 4710, Constitutional Law: Rights and Liberties (3 hours)

POLS 4960R, Faculty-Mentored Undergraduate Research I (1-6 hours)

POLS 4970R, Faculty-Mentored Undergraduate Research II (1-6 hours)

POLS 4980R, Faculty-Mentored Undergraduate Research III (1-6 hours)

POLS 4990R, Undergraduate Research Thesis (or Final Project) (1-6 hours)

RELI(AFST) 3004, Global Christianity (3 hours)

RELI(HIST) 3150, Religion in the United States (3 hours)

RELI 4002/6002, Prophetic Literature of the Old Testament/Hebrew Bible (3 hours)

RELI 4070/6070, Judaism (3 hours)

RELI 4071/6071, The Holocaust (3 hours)

RELI 4081/6081, Jesus (3 hours)

RELI 4095/6095, Christianity and Sustainability (3 hours)

RELI(ANTH) 4110/6110, Anthropology and American Religion (3 hours)

RELI 4204/6204, Martin Luther King, Jr. and Religion (3 hours)

RELI 4250/6250, Christian-Muslim Relations (3 hours)

RELI 4300/6300, Islam and Its World (3 hours)

RELI 4402/6402, Confucianism and Chinese Tradition (3 hours)

RELI 4410/6410, Gandhi and Nonviolence: History, Theory, Practice (3 hours)

RELI 4800, Reading and Research in Religion (3 hours)

RELI 4960R, Faculty-Mentored Undergraduate Research I (1-6 hours)

RELI 4970R, Faculty-Mentored Undergraduate Research II (1-6 hours)

RELI 4980R, Faculty-Mentored Undergraduate Research III (1-6 hours)

RELI 4990R, Undergraduate Research Thesis (or Final Project) (1-6 hours)

Students may petition to have other relevant courses count toward the certificate.

Internship (Optional): For the remaining course, students may choose RELI(POLS)(INTL) 4699, Religion and Politics Internship. If students choose the internship, no more than 3 hours of the internship may count toward the certificate. Students pursuing the internship option must have completed the prerequisite courses for the certificate and must have been admitted to the certificate program. Students are responsible for identifying and securing a relevant internship placement in consultation with the Certificate Director, who must approve the internship.

Examples of potential internships include placements in local government administration, in the office of an elected official, in a political lobbying firm, in a law firm that deals with religious cases, in a faith-based organization that is involved in local organizing, social services, or conflict resolution/reconciliation, or in a news outlet that reports on religious and political issues. In addition, students will be expected to agree on the parameters of their internship experience with a selected faculty supervisor, who will act as the instructor of record. The faculty supervisor will be responsible for developing and grading any assignments, such as readings, written reflections, and/or periodic conversations, and for submitting an S/U grade at the conclusion of the student's internship.

5. Model Program and Accreditation

a. Identify any model programs, accepted disciplinary standards, and accepted curricular practices against which the proposed program could be judged. Evaluate the extent to which the proposed curriculum is consistent with these external points of reference and provide a rationale for significant inconsistencies and differences that may exist.

Although UGA has comparatively few peers administering programs in religion and politics, there are a few notable analogues. Washington University at St. Louis has approved an Undergraduate Minor in Religion and Politics that includes required and elective coursework, including on Religious Freedom in America, The Good Life Between Religion and Politics, Religion and American Society, and Between Malcolm X and Martin Luther King Jr.⁶ Similarly, Arizona State University offers an Undergraduate Major in Religious Studies with a Concentration in Religion, Politics, and Global Affairs. In this major, students consider “how the study of religion expands the understanding of political culture, communal formation, governance, nationalism, statehood and citizenship in domestic and global contexts,” and courses include Religion in America, Islam and World Affairs, and Religion and Global Politics.⁷ The curriculum of this proposed certificate is consistent with these comparable undergraduate programs in scope and type of coursework. In addition, the proposed certificate ensures consistency by requiring students to complete courses from both Religion (RELI) and International Affairs and Political Science (INTL/POLS) to assure breadth in both literacy in the study of religion and the study of politics.

b. If program accreditation is available, provide an analysis of the ability of the program to satisfy the curricular standards of such specialized accreditation.

No accreditation is available for this proposed certificate program.

6. Student Learning Outcomes

The overall goal of this certificate program is to provide education and training in the critical analysis of religion and politics. All students successfully completing this program should have:

- LO1: The ability to identify and summarize key characteristics of the major religious traditions relevant to politics in the United States and beyond.
- LO2: The ability to ask questions, discuss, and elucidate the influence of religious affiliations and institutions on public life and governance institutions with reference to specific case studies from the United States or international contexts.
- LO3: The ability to utilize relevant theoretical frameworks to understand complex religious-political phenomena such as religious nationalism, religiously-informed political conflict, and religiously-informed political mobilization.
- LO4: The ability to articulate their own arguments, supported by evidence and sound judgment, regarding how religious communities interact with legal and governmental structures in the United States or beyond.

⁶ <https://bulletin.wustl.edu/undergrad/artsci/minors/religionandpolitics/>

⁷ <https://shprs.asu.edu/degree/undergraduate/religious-studies-religion-politics-and-global-affairs-ba>

Learning Outcome	This outcome will be practiced through:
<p><i>LO1:</i> The ability to identify and summarize key characteristics of the major religious traditions relevant to politics in the United States and beyond.</p>	<p><i>Activities and assignments in courses that address major religious traditions.</i></p> <p>This can apply to all courses on the list but special mention may be made of: POLS 4690, Religion and American Politics; the prerequisite RELI 1000-level or 2000-level course; RELI(AFST) 3004, Global Christianity; RELI 4070/6070, Judaism; RELI 4081/6081, Jesus; RELI 4300/6300, Islam and Its World; and RELI 4402/6402, Confucianism and Chinese Tradition.</p>
<p><i>LO2:</i> The ability to ask questions, discuss, and elucidate the influence of religious affiliations and institutions on public life and governance institutions with reference to specific case studies from the United States or international contexts.</p>	<p><i>Activities and assignments in courses that address religious affiliations, public life, and governance institutions.</i></p> <p>This can apply to all courses on the list but special mention may be made of: INTL 3300, Introduction to Comparative Politics; the prerequisite POLS 1101, American Government; POLS 3000, Introduction to Political Theory; POLS 4690, Religion and American Politics; POLS 4710, Constitutional Law: Rights and Liberties; RELI(HIST) 3150, Religion in the United States; and RELI(ANTH) 4110/6110, Anthropology and American Religion.</p>
<p><i>LO3:</i> The ability to utilize relevant theoretical frameworks to understand complex religious-political phenomena such as religious nationalism, religiously-informed political conflict, and religiously-informed political mobilization.</p>	<p><i>Activities and assignments in courses that address complex religious-political phenomena.</i></p> <p>This can apply to all courses on the list but special mention may be made of: INTL(AFST) 4280, Nationalism and Ethnic Conflict; INTL 4335, Far Right Politics in Western Democracies; INTL 4370, Middle East Politics; INTL 4371, Israeli Politics; INTL 4455, Violent Political Conflict; RELI 4002/6002, Prophetic Literature of the Old Testament/Hebrew Bible; RELI 4071/6071, The Holocaust; RELI 4095/6095, Christianity and Sustainability; RELI 4204/6204, Martin Luther King, Jr. and Religion; RELI 4250/6250, Christian-Muslim Relations; and RELI 4410/6410, Gandhi and Nonviolence: History, Theory, Practice.</p>
<p><i>LO4:</i> The ability to articulate their own arguments, supported by evidence and sound judgment, regarding how</p>	<p><i>Activities and assignments in courses that require students to articulate their own arguments regarding the interaction between religion and politics.</i></p>

religious communities interact with legal and governmental structures in the United States or beyond.	This can apply to all courses on the list but special mention may be made of: INTL 4960R , Faculty-Mentored Undergraduate Research I; INTL 4970R , Faculty-Mentored Undergraduate Research II; INTL 4980R , Faculty-Mentored Undergraduate Research III; INTL 4990R , Undergraduate Research Thesis (or Final Project); POLS 4645E , Applied Civic Engagement - Service Learning; POLS 4960R , Faculty-Mentored Undergraduate Research I; POLS 4970R , Faculty-Mentored Undergraduate Research II; POLS 4980R , Faculty-Mentored Undergraduate Research III; POLS 4990R , Undergraduate Research Thesis (or Final Project); RELI 4800 , Reading and Research in Religion; RELI 4960R , Faculty-Mentored Undergraduate Research I; RELI 4970R , Faculty-Mentored Undergraduate Research II; RELI 4980R , Faculty-Mentored Undergraduate Research III; RELI 4990R , Undergraduate Research Thesis (or Final Project); and RELI(POLS)(INTL) 4699 , Religion and Politics Internship.
---	--

7. Assessment and Admissions

Describe how the learning outcomes for the program will be assessed.

Some or all of the program outcomes above will overlap with the objectives of each course in the certificate program, and course objectives will be assessed at the course level.

At the program level, the Certificate Director will administer 1) a brief, online start-of-program survey to each student upon admission to the certificate program and 2) a brief, online end-of-program survey to each student upon completion of the certificate program. The start-of-program and end-of-program survey responses can be compared to understand student growth over the course of the certificate and can gauge students' knowledge in relation to the program objectives. In addition, the survey responses will provide the Director with data to indicate areas of strength and areas needing improvement for the certificate.

The program of study also includes an optional internship experience, **RELI(POLS)(INTL) 4699**, Religion and Politics Internship. The internship is designed to simultaneously assess what the students have learned over the course of their studies and to offer the students an experiential learning opportunity to apply their knowledge in a professional setting. The Certificate Director will collect documentation of 1) students' and host-organizations' expectations for the internship and 2) students' and host's appraisal of the internship experience (post-assessment) for each internship.

Describe the process and criteria for how students will be admitted to and retained in the program.

Entrance Requirements: To be admitted to the certificate program, a student must have completed 30 credit hours and their overall GPA must be 3.2 or higher. The following course prerequisites must be completed:

One RELI 1000-level course (3 hours) OR one RELI 2000-level course (3 hours)

AND

POLS 1101, American Government (3 hours)

As part of the application, a student must submit a statement of no more than 500 words to the Certificate Director to explain their interest in the certificate program.