

**Office of the Vice
Provost for Academic
Affairs (VPAA)**

Memo

To: Curtis Clock, Associate Registrar

From: Tarek Mahfouz, Associate Vice Provost for Academic Planning and Operations

cc: Kevin Smith, Associate Dean of the College of Sciences and Humanities
Elizabeth Swisher-Flood, Assistant Registrar
Peggy Dessing, Curriculum Coordinator
Jennifer Grinstead, Administrator Coordinator for the Office of the Vice Provost for Academic Affairs

Date: April 03, 2026

Re: Exception for the Certificate in Religion at Work

In reference to the Certificate in Religion at Work submitted by the College of Sciences and Humanities and as per the established procedure for exemptions, I am providing this memo to indicate the approval of establishing the Certificate in Religion at Work at ten (10) credits, which is under the minimum limit of 12 credits set forth within the Faculty and Professional Handbook (section 81.3.4.2). Please find enclosed to this memo the rationale submitted by academic unit.

Dear Dr. Anand Marri and Dr. Kecia McBride,

I am writing to request an exemption from the minimum 12-credit undergraduate certificate program requirement present in section 81.3.4.2 of the *Faculty and Professional Personnel Handbook* for a newly proposed **Certificate in Religion at Work** offered by the Religious Studies program.

In a meeting earlier today (3/20/2025) with Dr. Tarek Mahfouz, Dr. Kevin Smith, Peggy Dessing, and Elizabeth Swisher Flood, we discussed the reasons for proposing this as a ten (10) credit rather than 12 credit certificate and agreed that these reasons were sufficient to petition for an exemption. We ask for this exemption for the following reasons:

- 1) **Aligns with Similar Programs:** This program has been in development since 2020, in conversation with a number of other universities and granting organizations, including the AAC&U, Interfaith America, and the University of Vermont. We are modeling this program based on their recommendations and experience in building similar certificates. Ten (10) credits is the ideal length for students in the pre-professional majors that are a primary target audience.
- 2) **Meets Our Students' Needs:** A number of majors and departments on campus have expressed extensive interest in this program, stating that their students need this kind of training to succeed in the workplace but that they don't have the ability to offer it in-house. At the same time, their students already have a large number of required credits to complete their major and often do not have time to add an additional minor. At ten (10) credits, we can assure that this certificate can fit into any student's course of study and that they can fulfill its requirements within three (3) semesters, allowing them to add it successfully to their portfolio later in their Ball State career.
- 3) **Online Availability:** At ten (10) credits, this certificate can be made available fully online—both for fully online students and for main campus students who may struggle to schedule face-to-face courses late in their programs (e.g. nursing students in rotations). The Division of Online and Strategic Learning (DOSL) has expressed interest in advertising this certificate to online students, especially those in education. At ten (10) credits, we can ensure a fully online path to complete the certificate and to do so within three (3) semesters. Due to current Religious Studies staffing, it would be untenable to create and develop a new fully online course beyond our existing offerings so as to expand the certificate to 13 credits and thereby offer it fully online in its expanded size. Thus a potentially beneficial credential would be unavailable to our online students, many of whom are in fields where they could readily benefit from it.
- 4) **Professional Credentialing and Employability:** Religion in the Workplace is a new and growing area of interest for both employers and universities. Ball State is likely

to be among the first dozen universities to develop and offer this certificate, alongside places like the University of Vermont, Miami of Ohio, and Missouri State, among others. Granting organizations like Interfaith America, The Aspen Institute, and the Arthur Vining Foundation are interested in supporting and developing these programs. Drs. Marchal and myself have been asked to lead workshops on this topic for public K-12 teachers in exchange for continuing education credit and for local businesses for their Human Resources departments. We suspect that this will continue to be a growing area of interest for K-12 educators as laws around teaching about religion in school shift, and for employers as the demographics of the workforce change and the legal landscape around religious diversity becomes more fraught. At ten (10) credits, this program will allow non-degree-seeking professionals to quickly and easily obtain this certificate, perhaps online over evenings and weekends.

For these reasons, we humbly ask that you consider exempting the Religion at Work Certificate from the 12-credit requirement outlined in the handbook. I am happy to discuss this further with you if you have any additional questions.

Thank you for your time and consideration,

Dr. Matthew R. Hotham
Associate Professor of Religious Studies

Encl: Religion at Work Certificate Program proposal