

University begins new Catholic studies minor

ATLANTA - Starting this January, students at Emory University in Atlanta have the chance to learn about famous Catholics as part of a new Catholic studies minor at the liberal arts university.

The program is the only such minor in the country at a non-Catholic college or university, according to Emory officials.

With a significant number of Catholic students at Emory, the minor will give these students an opportunity to learn more about the roots of their faith. Jack Zupko, assistant professor of philosophy at the university, also hopes the program will help students to gain a better understanding of the relationship between church and state.

“We need to train student scholars to look at religion and secular interests in a way that’s not hostile,” he told *The Georgia Bulletin*, newspaper of the Atlanta Archdiocese.

The minor concentrates on the impact of Catholicism’s intellectual and cultural traditions on Western thought and is described as “entirely secular and academic” - not to be confused with formation in the Catholic faith.

The new endeavor, which received final approval last spring, grew out of interest by Catholic faculty members associated with the Aquinas Center of Theology, an autonomous affiliate of the university since 1987 that seeks to provide a Catholic scholarly presence at the university.

Mr. Zupko noted that Catholic faculty members have been teaching within a number of departments; they include one who has been teaching in the School of Religion and the sociology department. Others teach classes from art to history that include Catholicism’s influence.

He said the work of crafting a Catholic studies minor in a relatively short amount of

time was “plausible because there were so many interests covered already.”

Students in the minor program must complete five courses, including a required course on modern Catholicism that examines the history of the Catholic Church after the Council of Trent. Students can choose their remaining classes from a selection of 29 courses ranging from the study of the Italian Renaissance, the sociology of religion and Jesus and the Gospels, to courses on Catholic authors or literary movements.

“We wanted to keep it simple. The students already have many area requirements and there is not much room for electives,” Mr. Zupko added.

While Emory’s roots are in the Methodist Church, the university is considered a nondenominational campus and has significant numbers of Jewish and Catholic students.

Mr. Zupko said the minor might also instill a deeper appreciation for the depth and breadth of the Catholic experience, which some Catholic students may currently lack.

He relayed a story from one professor who came upon a class, which included Catholics, that was unfamiliar with the rosary. The professor brought one in and explained the practice, which was “the common way” for Catholics to pray in “my grandpa’s generation,” he said.

Mr. Zupko hopes to attract students to the Catholic studies program by advertising in the campus newspaper and in other ways.

“We want to get some kind of campus buzz going about it,” he said, but he also understands the program will take some time to build.

“Students are usually cautious about which major or minor they choose,” he added.