

# Religious Studies

View Religious Studies website

The study of religion is essential to a liberal arts education that focuses on diversity, on social, global and environmental responsibility, and on the growth of the intellectual and creative mind. The field of religious studies promotes the academic and multidisciplinary study of religious life. It recognizes that religion has played a profound role throughout human history at the individual and social levels. One cannot claim to have a deep understanding of Western civilizations, past or present, without familiarity with Judaism, Christianity, and Islam; nor can one claim a deep understanding of Asian civilizations without knowledge of Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism, and Daoism. Additionally, in studying contemporary societies and individuals, one must recognize and seek to understand the globalizing intersections of religious traditions, and the ways in which these intersections inform human action and experience.

Students who take religious studies as a minor will have achieved the following goals:

- Critical appreciation of religious experiences within multiple world traditions
- Knowledge of at least two religious world traditions and an understanding of their broader historical and cultural contexts
- Sufficient familiarity with religious studies terms and approaches to make coherent arguments pertaining to religion
- Demonstrated capacity to integrate their knowledge of religious studies with their other field(s) of academic interests

Courses in religious studies are designed to achieve the following:

- Provide an accurate representation of religious traditions as they have been and continue to be practiced
- Foster critical skills in analyzing religious beliefs, symbolic systems, practices, theologies, and philosophies
- Raise fundamental questions about the nature of human beings and their place in the cosmos
- Generate discussion on questions of meaning and value and help students take moral dilemmas seriously

- Delineate the social and psychological dimensions of religious life
- Introduce the major concepts, theories and methods of religious studies

Some courses focus on particular themes and issues related to religion, such as the nature and reality of the sacred, the problem of evil, death and dying, ultimate liberation and salvation, religion and science, or gender bias and the problem of patriarchy in the world religions. Other courses cover the fundamentals of particular religious traditions, such as their sacred scriptures and visions of ultimate reality, their doctrines and worldviews, as well as their communities, institutions, ritual practices, and cultural and historical expressions. Yet other courses focus on different methodological and comparative approaches to religion. In general, religious studies courses foster research and writing skills, and prepare students to do independent learning and thinking.

Because it is multi-disciplinary, comparative and global in focus, the religious studies major fosters insight into not only one's own personal, cultural and historical contexts, but into those of others as well. A major or minor in religious studies encourages the development of skills that will be of tangible benefit to students in their pursuit of any professional career: the skills entailed in close textual reading and analysis; detailed ethnographic observations; critical and constructive writing and communication; and clear and convincing verbal argumentation. The religious studies major also prepares students for the promises and challenges of living alertly and conscientiously in today's globalized world. These skills help to illuminate which careers may be most meaningful and satisfying to particular students.

## Learning Outcomes

- Articulate the core scriptures or teachings of at least two religious traditions
- Explain the historical development of at least two religious traditions
- Explain the cultural or psychological dimensions of religious phenomena
- Use the vocabulary of religious studies or specific religious traditions to articulate questions of personal identity and meaning
- Construct effective written and oral communication of ideas in Religious Studies
- Evaluate claims made about religious traditions and phenomena
- Use appropriate sources in discussions of religious traditions and phenomena

## Degree Requirements for the Major

### General College Requirements

General College Requirements (see “Curriculum” section)

At least 40 credit hours in religious studies, as specified below. A grade of C- or better must be received in each course of the major and the cumulative grade point average of courses used to satisfy the major must be at least 2.0:

### Required Courses

12 credit hours as follows:

- RELG 110: Introduction to the Study of Religions or four credit hours of any 200-level RELG course
- Eight additional credit hours of 200-level RELG courses

### Elective Courses

20 additional 300- or 400-level credit hours in Religious Studies courses

### Senior Experience

St. Mary’s Project, eight credit hours: Students who complete an SMP outside of RELG 493/494 must complete eight credit hours chosen from any 300- or 400-level RELG courses listed in the College catalog, in addition to the courses used by the student to satisfy the other requirements of the religious studies major. After consultation with the department chair, a reduction of four or eight credit hours may be granted for SMPs with substantial religious studies content. (Please note: Prerequisite for RELG 493 is RELG 492.)

### Sequence of Study

The following model is suggested as a sequence of study that satisfies the above requirements:

- First Year:  
Core Curriculum requirements, and RELG 110 or a 200-level RELG course
- Second Year:  
Core Curriculum requirements, one RELG course at the 200 level and one upper-division, elective RELG course
- Junior Year:  
Completion of Core Curriculum requirements; completing the 200-level RELG courses; three upper-division, elective RELG courses in religious studies; RELG 492 (SMP Proseminar).

- Senior Year:

Completion of remaining requirements for the elective courses and an eight credit-hour St. Mary's Project (usually RELG 493/494)

### Course Frequency

At least two 200-level courses will be offered each semester, with each course offered at least once every two years.

At least four of the following upper-division courses will be offered each semester, with each course offered at least once every two years.

## Degree Requirements for the Minor

### General College Requirements

General College requirements (see "Curriculum" section).

### Required Courses

At least 20 credit hours in religious studies of which at least 12 credit hours must be at the 300-level or above. A grade of C- or better must be received in each course of the minor and the cumulative grade point average of courses used to satisfy the minor must be at least 2.0.

## Faculty

Betül Başaran, Katharina von Kellenbach, Daniel Meckel, Michael Taber (department chair)