Religious Studies

Program Mission Statement

Religious Studies is a multi-disciplinary effort to examine the phenomenon known as religion in an impartial, academic manner. Religious Studies scholars compare the aspects of the variety of the world’s religions, they ask philosophical questions about the nature of religion, and they explore the relationship between religions and the larger cultural context in which religions are found. Religious Studies teaches students to engage and understand worldviews different from their own. This not only broadens the students’ perspectives, but also provides skills useful in the global context in which we live. Religious Studies contributes to a student's grounding in the classical liberal arts. It focuses on clear thinking and writing and teaches students both to ask insightful questions and to see the world through the eyes of others. Its faculty actively conduct research that contributes to the understanding of religions and maintains professional associations with the American Academy of Religion and other national organizations. Faculty are encouraged to engage in public scholarship.

Student Learning Outcomes

Graduates will be able to:

Content/Discipline-Specific Knowledge/Skills

• Explain religion as a product of particular social, historical, and cultural contexts.

• Explain major theories of religious studies and recognize the complexity of defining religion.

Communication Skills

• Write an extended paper with clear prose.

Critical Thinking Skills

• Excavate religious systems to recognize the embedded assumptions on which they are based through comparison and analysis.

• Identify the strengths and limitations of major theories of religious studies.

Assessment Approaches

The religious studies major will be assessed in a 3-year cycle through tests that require students to know and describe elements of religious traditions, to compare the historical development of religious traditions, and to be able to compare and contrasts religion in their specific cultural and social contexts in order to develop critical thinking skills. Majors will also be assessed through papers, some employing original research, that require them to bring together the theoretical and methodological skills developed in the major and apply them to a specific area of data.