Religious Studies

Religious studies is a uniquely comparative, cross-cultural and interdisciplinary way to study the world’s religions. Students develop a broad knowledge of the world’s religions past and present, along with the opportunity for critical analysis of the role of religion in relation to other social and cultural domains: history, politics, art, literature, science, technology, the media.

During their studies, students develop strong skills in analytical and critical thinking, written and spoken communication, and an understanding of cultural differences as they attend to the intersections of gender, ethnicity, race and class in relation to religious traditions and practices.

Students choose one of following two areas of concentration.

Study of religions: The in-depth study of different religious practices and beliefs in specific historical, cultural and geographical contexts. This concentration does not focus on religions in isolation, but on the similarities and differences among different traditions and on the many varying roles of religion in relation to other aspects of culture: history, literature, the arts, social institutions. This focus area emphasizes different disciplinary approaches to the study of religion, including historical, anthropological, psychological, sociological, cognitive and aesthetic.

Religions and cultures: The study of religions in relation to cultural, social and political institutions, and in relation to categories of identity and difference. This concentration does not focus on religion in isolation, but examines religion through the insights and methods of literary studies, ethnography, historiography, social analysis and cultural comparison. Religion is viewed as a set of beliefs and practices that are inextricably intertwined with race, class, gender and ethnicity, among other categories of affiliation and identification. Students also reflect on the category of religion itself, exploring the interrelations between knowledge and power in our own academic discourse about “religion.”

Pursuing Religious Studies at Ohio State
All freshman applicants are considered within a competitive admission process for the Columbus campus; find admissions criteria at go.osu.edu/admissions.

Upon admission to the university, students can declare a major in religious studies within the College of Arts and Sciences. Interested students should contact the undergraduate advisor in the Department of Comparative Studies and an undergraduate advisor in the College of the Arts and Sciences.

Often students are unfamiliar with this field and decide upon the religious studies major after taking a course such as Introduction to Comparative Religion, or Comparative Sacred Texts.

The religious studies undergraduate program is interdisciplinary and calls upon students to actively participate in shaping the major for themselves. Consequently, the major is both academically rigorous and tailored to students’ particular interests. Those interests may center, for example, upon relationships between science and religion, or between different religious traditions, or between religion and gender.

All religious studies students will be grounded in the study of a particular area (e.g., indigenous religions or religion and politics) and at the same time well-equipped to analyze the various relationships and interconnections across different religious traditions and between religion and other social and cultural areas.

In consultation with their advisors, students choose elective courses from a list of specified classes in other departments as well as required and elective courses in comparative studies. Each student’s course work will be different, but will be coherent and focused within one of the two areas of concentration.

Requirements for Religious Studies
The religious studies major requires 36 semester hours in comparative studies and in fields related to the student’s area of concentration, including at least 24 credit hours at the 3000 level and above. Depending upon their interests, students may choose some courses offered by various participating units, including the departments of African-American and African Studies, Classics, History, History of Art, Philosophy, Women’s, Gender and Sexuality Studies, and language and literature departments.

The study of religions concentration includes:
- Four core courses to provide introductory and capstone experiences
- Electives to fulfill both cross-cultural and interdisciplinary distribution requirements (in relation to history, art, literature, and social and political institutions).

The religions and cultures concentration includes:
- Two foundation courses to provide introductory and methodological background
- Interdisciplinary, thematic and comparative courses that emphasize cultural and social theory and relationships between religion and other elements of culture
- Distribution requirements to provide depth and focus in specific religious traditions

For more information, check these websites:

Religious Studies: comparativestudies.osu.edu
Arts and Sciences: artsandsciences.osu.edu
Ohio State: osu.edu
Admissions: undergrad.osu.edu
First Year Experience Program: fye.osu.edu
Co-Curricular Opportunities
Ohio State offers many opportunities for students to learn and grow outside of the classroom. These range from cooperative education (co-op) and internships to study abroad programs to student organizations. Co-ops and internships place students in professional environments while they are Ohio State students. Ohio State offers more than 100 study abroad programs in 40 countries around the world. In addition, there are hundreds of student organizations on campus to meet the interests of a diverse student population.

These experiences enable students to gain valuable work experience, learn about cultures and take on leadership roles before they enter the workforce. All of these experiences enhance learning and may provide an advantage in the job market.

Honors & Scholars Programs
Ohio State offers the Honors and Scholars programs to create an environment of intellectual support and stimulation within a close-knit community of high-ability undergraduate students. Through these programs, students have access to smaller classes, undergraduate research opportunities, close working relationships with faculty, priority scheduling and unique housing options. Honors and scholars programs represent great opportunities to be part of a smaller community within a large university. Learn more about the Honors and Scholars programs at honors-scholars.osu.edu.

Career Prospects in Religious Studies
Students majoring in religious studies develop strong skills in analytical and critical thinking and in written and spoken communication. These skills are essential to many positions in both the public and private sector: government; the law; local, national and international service organizations; business and industry; and all levels of education. Religious studies students also develop their understanding of religious and cultural differences, including those of gender, ethnicity, race and class. In an increasingly diverse nation and interconnected world, employers have come to value this important area of expertise.

Graduates with a degree in religious studies are well-prepared to pursue a wide range of academic fields—including religious studies, cultural studies, English, history and American studies—at excellent graduate schools, both public and private. Graduates of the program will also be well-positioned to attend professional schools and pursue degrees in law, medicine, teaching or social work.

Curriculum Sample
This is a sample list of classes a student will take to pursue a degree in religious studies. Since university students need more than a specific education in a narrow field, they will also take classes to complete General Education (GE) requirements. GE requirements allow students to develop the fundamental skills essential to collegiate success across major programs. Course work options satisfying GE requirements often come from a variety of academic areas of study allowing students to tailor their GE courses toward their interests. Note: This sample represents one of several possible paths to a degree in religious studies. Consult the departmental website, comparativestudies.osu.edu, for details about the many possible configurations of the course of study.

Classes that are intended to fulfill requirements for the religions and cultures concentration are marked “RC.” Those intended for the study of religions concentration are marked “SR.” Classes without such designations fulfills requirements for both concentrations.

Freshmen Year:
Survey course 1
Introduction to Comparative Religion 3
Electives 3
GE courses 24
Total hours 31

Sophomore Year:
Native American Religions (RC) 3
Philosophy of Religion (RC) 3
The World of the Rabbis (SR) 3
Introduction to Buddhist Art (SR) 3
GE courses 24
Total hours 30

Junior Year:
Contemporary Religious Movements (RC) 3
Approaches to the Study of Religion (RC) 3
Approaches to Comparative Studies (RC) 3
The Japanese Religious Tradition 3
Introduction to the Qu’ran 3
Foundational Approaches to the Study of Religion (SR) 3
Religions of Mesoamerica (SR) 3
Persian Mythology and Folklore (SR) 3
Electives courses 6
GE courses 9
Total hours 30

Senior Year:
Gender and Sexuality in Religion (RC) 3
New Age Religions (RC) 3
Senior Seminar (RC) 3
Myth and Ritual 3
Comparative Sacred Architecture (SR) 3
Contemporary Approaches to the Study of Religion (SR) 3
Capstone Course in Religious Studies (SR) 3
Electives 9
GEC 9
Total hours 30

Revised September 2015. Information subject to change. For the most up-to-date information on the religious studies program, please visit comparativestudies.osu.edu.

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