

Religious Studies Student Learning Goals

The overarching goal of the Religious Studies Department is to introduce students to the academic study of religion. The department's mission is to educate students about the key role religion plays in human history, politics, culture, and in human life by teaching a variety of methodological and theoretical approaches.

To achieve this mission, we have identified the following central learning goals for our students:

1. **Students learn to articulate, discuss and analyze religious pluralism both within and between specific traditions.**
2. **Students learn that the academic study of religion treats spirituality as a *human* phenomenon.**
3. **Students are able to utilize a variety of classical and contemporary methodological approaches, and employ, integrate, and articulate the perspectives of other academic fields when they interpret religious phenomena.**
4. **Students work with different types of “texts,” including, for example, scriptures, religious literatures, rituals, sacred art objects and architecture, and film.**
5. **Students recognize that people's lives are rooted in different religious worlds that profoundly affect their experiences, politics, ethical, and aesthetic sensibilities.**

Knowledge of the Field/Discipline:

1. **Diversity of world religions.** Students gain a basic knowledge of several religious traditions. In Religion 100, students typically study two or three different religious worlds using a selection of theoretical models as their interpretative lens. Many 200 and 300 courses offer detailed surveys of the historical and intellectual development of Eastern and Western religious traditions.
2. **Important themes, issues, and topics related to religion.** Courses explore key religious topics (e.g. the Holocaust), important issues (e.g. feminist issues in religion), and themes (e.g. new religious movements, fundamentalism, religious violence, religion and politics, religion and evolution, etc).
3. **Religion as a complex phenomenon.** Religion cannot be understood apart from art, economics, politics, gender, psychology, and so on.
4. **Religion's powerful role in human life.** Because religion(s) claims a transcendent status, and provides cosmological, ethical, and existential models of reality and imperatives for orienting individuals and societies worldwide, students are able to articulately discuss and examine the social, political, economic and psychological power of religion as a force exercising significant psychological and social consequences in human affairs—nationally, trans-nationally, and globally in the pre-modern, modern, and post-modern world.

Methodology of the Discipline:

1. **Humanities-based perspective.** Studying religion(s) as a *human* phenomenon is the key approach of the program. Therefore, students distinguish clearly between the sectarian practice of religion and the academic study of religion(s).
2. **Key interpretative approaches.** These include the history of religions, biblical studies, gender studies, the social sciences, and literary and cultural studies approaches. In REL 100, students are introduced to the academic study of religion by exploring key methodological approaches. In 200 and 300 level courses, students understand and apply specific methodologies relevant to the particular theme or topic under study. REL 460, the majors' course, reviews key approaches in the study of religion in greater depth to prepare students for individual research.
3. **Inter-disciplinary perspective.** Religious studies courses utilize a variety of disciplines (anthropology, gender studies, history, film studies, etc.) to challenge students to become critical and integrative through emphasizing an interdisciplinary perspective, directly tying the study of religion to a broader liberal arts education.
4. **Analytical and critical skills.** Religious studies courses train students to be reflective of the subject matter, fostering a close, nuanced, and multi-leveled critical appreciation that is historical, comparative, and thematically based.

Habits of Mind and Intellectual Skills:

1. **Sympathetic understanding.** Students learn to see the world through the different eyes of Muslims, Christians, Jews, Hindus, Buddhists, etc.
2. **Critical self-reflection.** Students are able to transcend personal assumptions about the nature of the self, society, and the universe. Studying religion(s) makes visible these assumptions, and it encourages open-mindedness by liberating students from the confines of a narrowly dogmatic, parochial, and ethno-centric perspective.
3. **Self-Understanding.** Studying religion deepens students' self-understanding. What is the ultimate meaning and value of human existence? Through examining the different answers to these questions in world religions, students develop their own personal ethic of considered values and spiritual sensibilities.