RELIGIOUS STUDIES

Religion is one fundamental way humans order and discern meaning and frame identity, both collective and individual. In the study of religion, students learn what religion is; how religion both shapes and reflects culture, society, politics, and individual experience; and the multiple ways religion matters and has mattered locally and globally, from antiquity to the present. Through the examination of varied disciplinary approaches and exposure to concrete diverse cultural expressions of religion, the department fosters students’ broad and deep apprehension of religion’s place(s) in human experience. The department’s educational work aims to strengthen students’ capacities to read carefully, question critically, communicate knowledge effectively, and apply their learning in civic engagement.

The University regards the academic study of religion as an integral part of liberal, humane learning and seeks to assist students in understanding the role religion plays in human existence and culture. Instruction in the Department of Religious Studies is non-sectarian and seeks an open analysis of all points of view. Courses are designed to provide a general orientation to the academic study of religion for the undergraduate student, as well as more advanced exposure for those who wish to pursue professional careers where a study of religious ideas and institutions would be helpful, such as in psychology, sociology, history, journalism, teaching, law, medicine, the fine arts, religious education, the ministry, and the rabbinate.

The Department sponsors a wide variety of speakers and events each year, including a Religious Studies Colloquium series and a Forum on Religion and Public Life. The Forum has enriched the existing curriculum by bringing to the campus outstanding scholars and public intellectuals.

Educational Objectives

The general educational objectives of the Department are

1. to explore texts, histories, and ways in which humans from various cultures have understood their world including the beliefs, ethics, rituals, artifacts, and organizations of religions;
2. to understand the changing relationship between religion and elements of the wider culture including the dynamics of politics, art, economics, literature, and society and their relationship to religions;
3. to become familiar with the theories and methods used in the study of religion.

Degree Programs

The Department offers two tracks by which students may earn a major or a minor. The first track is Religious Studies, which is designed for students who are seeking a broad and comprehensive understanding of the world’s major religions and the cultures in which they are practiced. The second track is Religion and Health Care, which is designed for students who are interested in any aspect of health care or who wish to supplement their pre-med concentration with coursework in the field of Religious Studies.

Departmental Honors

The Department of Religious Studies encourages its majors and minors to intensify and deepen their knowledge of religious texts, traditions, and issues through its Departmental Honors Program. The program is designed to give our students the opportunity to explore various topics and problems in religion that are of particular interest to them, to work more closely with faculty in the department, to develop skills in research and thesis preparation, and in some cases to prepare for graduate work in religious studies or other disciplines.

Minimum requirements for the program are as follows:

1. A cumulative grade point average of at least 3.30;
2. A cumulative grade point average in religious studies of at least 3.50; and
3. A thesis that is approved by departmental faculty.

For the determination of honors, cumulative grade point average means either the average of all grades earned at the University of Miami or the combined average of all graded work taken at the University of Miami and elsewhere (whether or not the transfer work is accepted toward a degree at the University of Miami), whichever is lower.

Theta Alpha Kappa

Majors, minors, and other students who meet certain academic criteria are eligible for membership in Theta Alpha Kappa, the National Honor Society for Religious Studies and Theology. Theta Alpha Kappa sponsors events that enhance the academic and social life of the department.
In keeping with its emphasis on a global approach to the study of religion and society, the Department sponsors a study abroad program known as URome. This semester-on-location program, which is open to all qualified University of Miami undergraduate students, is offered each spring semester in collaboration with the American University of Rome. A limited amount of scholarship support for the URome program is available for qualified Religious Studies majors and minors.