Religious Studies

The School of Humanities

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Degrees Offered: B.A., M.A., Ph.D.

The undergraduate major includes courses in methodology (textual, historical, normative, and sociocultural approaches to the study of religion) and religious traditions (African religions, Buddhism, Christianity, comparative religions, Islam, and Judaism). The graduate program offers research degrees in 10 fields (see below). Within these clearly defined fields, students acquire a broad knowledge of religious studies with enough flexibility for interdisciplinary pursuits.

The Department of Religious Studies, in cooperation with the University of Texas Health Science Center, also offers a Ph.D. in biomedical ethics for students seeking to combine a rigorous training in religious studies (particularly theoretical approaches to ethics) with an interest in clinical and policy issues related to health care. The focus on health care distinguishes the program from those that concentrate more exclusively on moral philosophy or clinical ethics. Both the academic track and the professional track enable students to develop skills in interpreting religious/cultural texts and practices while engaging with theoretical and concrete issues in ethics, and the second track also prepares students to exercise clinical judgment, interpret cases, and engage in clinical research.

Degree Requirements for B.A. in Religious Studies

For general university requirements, see Graduation Requirements (pages 17–19). Students majoring or double-majoring in religious studies must complete:

• 24 semester hours (8 departmental courses)
• 18 hours (6 courses) at the 200, 300 or 400 level
• No more than 6 hours (2 courses) outside of religious studies

In order to ensure breadth and depth to the major, students are encouraged to work out a program of study with the undergraduate adviser. The 8 courses are to be selected according to the following requirements:

• RELI 101 Introduction to Religion to be taken in the first or second year
• A majors seminar to be taken in the junior or senior year
• 3 courses to be selected from one of the following fields: Judaism, Christianity, African Religions, Buddhism, Comparative Studies, Cross-Cultural Studies, Methodological Studies, and Ethics
• 3 courses to be selected from at least two other fields

Students who wish to pursue a course of study more directly oriented toward their intellectual and personal interests are referred to the existence of the area major. See Other Options for Undergraduate Majors in the catalog. As a rule, area majors in religious studies will be required to write a thesis.

In addition, students must also satisfy the distribution requirements and complete no fewer than 60 semester hours outside the departmental requirements for a program totaling at least 120 semester hours. See Distribution Requirements and Majors, etc., (pages 19–21).

Degree Requirements for M.A. and Ph.D. in Religious Studies

The graduate program accepts a limited number of qualified students. A distinguished undergraduate record and high scores on the Graduate Record Examination (GRE) are essential and, for Ph.D. applicants, an advanced degree in the humanities is desirable. For general university requirements, see Graduate Degrees (pages 72–73). Within the limits of available funds, fellowships and scholarships are awarded to qualified students. As part of their training, students usually assist the department in such areas as teaching or library work.

The M.A. in religious studies is a two-year program.
• Students take 8 courses in four fields (see Ph.D. field description below), with the distribution of these courses to be worked out with the graduate adviser and the student’s own faculty mentor, chosen early in the first semester
• In addition to course work, students are required to pass a reading exam by the end of their third semester in an appropriate biblical, Asian, or European foreign language
• M.A. thesis, preferably spanning two separate fields.
• Written exams are given in the remaining two fields, usually during the fourth semester

The Ph.D. in religious studies consists of 54 credit hours (18 courses); 6 courses are taken in the major field and 3 in each of two minor fields. The 6 remaining courses are selected at the discretion of the student in consultation with the graduate adviser and the student’s own mentor. These 6 courses may augment one of the minors, be used for language study, or probe new areas of inquiry in religious studies. This flexibility presumes close and continuous consultation between faculty and student; each student selects a faculty mentor in his or her main field of study on entering the program. Should the focus of study or other circumstances change, a new mentor may be requested.

Students are strongly encouraged to take one minor outside the cultural/geographical area of their major; they are also encouraged to see major and minor alike as part of a cohesive body of study by exploring thematic contrasts and likenesses in these fields. Majors can be in any of the following fields; however, at least one minor must be in an area other than the major. Thus, if the major is in Area I, at least one minor will be in Area II.

AREA I: TRADITIONS
Historical and textual studies in the following religious traditions:
1. Christianity and/or Judaism in Antiquity
2. Christianity and/or Judaism in the Modern World
3. Buddhism: Focus on India and Tibet
4. African Religions
AREA II: THEORIES AND METHODS
1. Ethics/Biomedical Ethics*
2. Psychology of Religion
3. Philosophy of Religion
4. Religion and Contemporary Culture
5. Comparative Studies
6. Mysticism

Languages. Because dissertation work in virtually all areas will involve foreign language materials, Ph.D. students in Religious Studies are required to gain sufficient linguistic training for their research. Language comprehensives may be taken in biblical, European, and Asian languages; generally, two languages other than English will be required. Advanced language courses with substantial thematic content may count toward the appropriate major or minor.

Reading Lists. Students become broadly familiar with the literature of their majors and minors; reading lists will be provided. Students are expected to familiarize themselves with this material such that they draw on it on their exams and the dissertation itself. The graduate seminar (see below) is, in part, an introduction to areas of the reading list and to the techniques for engaging in deep, independent reading.

Teaching. Opportunities may be available for students to participate in teaching courses. The precise degree and kind of participation vary. Opportunities to teach courses in local colleges and universities may also arise.

Qualifying for Dissertation Status. After completing course work, students will take three exams in their major area and one exam in each of their minors. The exams in the major will typically include one qualifying paper, which is intended to be a step toward the dissertation. The other two major exams can be either written responses to questions or a comprehensive paper; in either case, these will require an ability to survey the relevant literature in the reading lists. Minor exams can be either a response to questions, a comprehensive paper, or, less typically, a qualifying paper.

Some of the questions on these exams will be comparative, allowing the student to reflect on the relationship between their major and minor fields. Exact form and content of a particular student’s exams are worked out with the graduate and the graduate adviser and faculty mentor by the end of the fourth semester, or one year before the student expects to take the exams. Upon completion of these exams, one may petition for candidacy. The dissertation-writing phase of the student’s career begins with an oral discussion in which the student is encouraged to think out loud, in the company of faculty and fellow students, about the central questions of his or her study and the focus of the dissertation.

Rice University awards, on a competitive basis, four years of support for graduate study. We strongly encourage students to consult with faculty and the Financial Aid Office to identify funding possibilities for a fifth year to give sufficient time for reflection and writing of the dissertation.
*Degree Requirements for Ph.D. in Biomedical Ethics*

The Ph.D. program in biomedical ethics, operated in conjunction with the University of Texas, offers two tracks: one for those preparing to teach ethics and another for those seeking a career in a clinical or policy setting. The two tracks differ primarily in the course selection, made in consultation with the adviser and individual faculty members, and in the content of the Ph.D. comprehensive examination. For the Ph.D. in health care ethics, students must:

- Complete 54 semester hours of course work in the selected fields (see above)
- Pass reading examinations in two foreign languages
- Perform satisfactorily on examinations (see above), including written examinations in the two major fields of ethics and biomedical ethics
- Complete an approved thesis and present an oral defense

**Internships.** Students in the later stages of the program who seek careers in clinical areas, research institutes, or policy settings often have opportunities to conduct clinical research through internships with selected faculty members of the University of Texas Health Science Center.

See RELI (pages 479–489) in the Courses of Instruction section.