

RELIGIOUS STUDIES

Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies

Website: <https://www.washburn.edu/academics/college-schools/arts-sciences/departments/philosophy-religious-studies/index.html>
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Faculty

Associate Professor Chris Jones, PhD

Mission

Consistent with the missions of the University and the College of Arts and Sciences, the Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies is dedicated to providing high quality undergraduate courses in philosophy and religious studies, to providing the educational foundations for life-long critical thinking, to engaging in research and scholarly activities in these and related areas and to serving the University and its various communities. The Department emphasizes excellence in teaching undergraduate students.

Description of Discipline

Religious Studies is not just the study of religion. It begins with serious reflection on what we mean by "religion" and whether we all mean the same thing when we say it. Is religion a ubiquitous human phenomenon, the very thing that makes us human (as some have claimed)? Is religion about humanity's search for cosmic meaning, or is it a technique for social cohesion (and control), or is it a projection of our desires and fears, or is it something else entirely? These perspectives (and others) will be entertained and evaluated in religious studies courses at Washburn University.

Student Learning Outcomes

Religious Studies students at Washburn University, upon graduation, are expected to be able to:

- Identify central practices and historically significant developments within several different global religious traditions.
- Use a variety of different theoretical models to interpret and explain local religious expressions (including texts, artifacts, symbols, and behaviors).
- Communicate effectively about religion in a variety of different academic, civic, and job-related genres (oral and written).
- Assess the accuracy and credibility of information about religion in social settings, in public speech, and in print and electronic media.
- Analyze and contribute to the solution of complex problems that result from the intersection of religion with culture, society, economy, history, and politics.
- Evaluate their own religious biases and commitments and how they relate to people who act differently from themselves.

Religious Studies Program Honors

Religious Studies majors desiring to earn religious studies program honors must meet the following minimum requirement: graduating with at least a 3.5 overall and program GPA.

Programs

- Religious Studies, BA (<https://catalog.washburn.edu/undergraduate/college-arts-sciences/religious-studies/religious-studies-ba/>)
- Religious Studies, Minor (<https://catalog.washburn.edu/undergraduate/college-arts-sciences/religious-studies/religious-studies-minor/>)

Course Offerings

RG 101 Introduction to the Study of Religion (3)

This course introduces the academic study of religion. In it, we learn social scientific methods of study and we apply them to religious communities within the greater Topeka area. Students will ultimately be able to use what they learn in the course to make sense of religion wherever and however they encounter it in their careers and in their lives.

Prerequisite: None.

Course Attributes:

- Gen Ed AY 2024-2025: Arts and Humanities
- Gen Ed AY 2024-2025: Inclusion and Belonging
- Gen Ed Pre-AY 2024-2025: Humanities
- USLO: Global Citizenship, Ethics and Diversity

RG 102 World Religions (3)

A study of selected religious traditions around the world, using humanistic methods and focusing on questions of comparison and classification. What do religions have in common with one another? What makes them distinct? What makes something a "world" religion, and who gets to decide? Who gets left out? Prerequisite: None.

Course Attributes:

- Gen Ed AY 2024-2025: Arts and Humanities
- Gen Ed AY 2024-2025: Inclusion and Belonging
- Gen Ed Pre-AY 2024-2025: Humanities
- USLO: Global Citizenship, Ethics and Diversity

RG 103 Introduction to the Bible (3)

An introduction to the academic study of the Bible, including 1) biblical and non-biblical ancient texts in their historical contexts and 2) the historical processes that led to the creation of different canons of the Bible among Jews and Christians, and 3) the Bible's impact on modern issues like abortion, immigration, and the environment. Prerequisite: None.

Course Attributes:

- Gen Ed AY 2024-2025: Arts and Humanities
- Gen Ed Pre-AY 2024-2025: Humanities
- USLO: Critical and Creative Thinking

RG 110 Special Topics/Religion (1-3)

Topics will vary from semester to semester and will be announced in advance. May be repeated for credit when topics vary.

RG 207 Existence of God (3)

An elementary course in Philosophy and Religion focusing upon the specific rational arguments which have been advanced for and against the existence of a supreme being. Prerequisite: EN 101 or EN 102.

Course Attributes:

- Gen Ed AY 2024-2025: Arts and Humanities
- Gen Ed Pre-AY 2024-2025: Humanities
- USLO: Critical and Creative Thinking

RG 300 Special Topics/Religion (2-3)

Topics will vary from semester to semester and will be announced in advance. May be repeated for credit when topics vary. Prerequisite: three hours of Religion or PH 302.

RG 301 Prophets and Prophetic Books in Ancient Judaism (3)

In this course, ancient Jewish prophetic literature is examined, including biblical books like Isaiah and extra-canonical traditions like Enoch. Prophecy is studied against the backdrop of ancient Near Eastern divination, and focus is on the role of prophetic books (a uniquely Jewish phenomenon) in the shaping of early Judaism. Prerequisite: three hours of Religion.

RG 302 Jews, Christians, and Sex (3)

This course examines the historical development of Jewish and Christian teachings on sexuality, emphasizing the distinctions between Judaism and Christianity and the tremendous impact of the latter on Euro-American societies. We will examine ancient sources and modern interpretations of those sources. Students will have opportunities to critique various teachings about sexuality and to develop and defend their own ideas. Prerequisites: RG 101, RG 102, or RG 103.

RG 304 Race and Religion (3)

This course explores the generative intersections "race" and "religion" in the greater Atlantic world from the 15th century until the present moment. The purpose of this class is to evaluate claims about these intersections on the basis of public evidence and rational argumentation, in particular the claim that "race" and "religion" are social constructs invented by Europeans to facilitate the colonization of the rest of the world. Prerequisites: RG 101, RG 102, or RG 103.

RG 306 Ritual (3)

This class is an exploration of the concept of ritual. Do all societies have rituals and/or engage in ritualized behavior? Do animals have ritual? Is ritual a distinctly religious phenomenon? What roles do rituals play in human socialization? We will read a variety of theoretical and ethnographic materials on ritual; we will also observe and invent rituals in the real world. Prerequisites: RG 101, RG 102, or RG 103.

RG 331 Understanding Religion (3)

What do we mean when we call something "religion"? Who decides what is and is not "religion"? This course examines various approaches to the academic study of religion, focusing on current disciplinary debates over description versus explanation, insider/outsider dynamics, and the heuristic value of "religion" when applied to non-Western traditions. Prerequisite: Religious Studies Major, or consent of the instructor.

RG 386 Special Study (1-3)

Individual study of specialized subjects pertaining to religion. May be repeated for credit. Prerequisites: nine hours of Religion and permission in advance by the professor with whom the student desires to work.

RG 398 Capstone Preparation (3)

Students prepare for their senior capstone (RG 399) by developing a portfolio of prior work and reflecting on their growth during their time in college. They engage in vocational discernment, exploring potential career paths and identifying the steps that they need to take on those paths. Ultimately, they propose a senior capstone project for RG 399 that connects their prior learning in the major with their short- and long-term goals. Prerequisite: Senior Religious Studies Major.

RG 399 Religious Studies Capstone (3)

Students design and implement a project that reflects what they have learned in their careers as religious studies majors. The project will be chosen and prepared in RG 398. Potential senior capstone projects include, but are not limited to: independent research papers, community service projects, and internships. Students are required to submit materials demonstrating what they have learned and how it connects to their religious studies coursework, and they are required to present their project at a public campus event. Prerequisite: RG 398 with a grade of C or better.