



WESTERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY

Religious Studies

Department of Philosophy & Religious Studies, College of Arts & Sciences

The Department of Philosophy & Religious Studies

Philosophy and Religious Studies are two independent majors housed in the same department. Since they are fundamentally concerned with human cultures and values, both are in the humanities. For more information on the Philosophy major at Western Illinois University, please refer to our website or printed informational handouts.

Program of Study

Students majoring in Religious Studies take a core of four required courses, including a survey course in Western religions, a parallel survey course in Eastern religions, a one semester hour course in writing in the religious studies, and a senior Capstone Project. Students then have the opportunity to select courses from three subject areas: (1) *World Religions*, (2) *Religion and Culture*, and (3) *Religious Thought*.

Faculty

All faculty members in the Department of Philosophy & Religious Studies possess the Ph.D. in either Philosophy or Religious Studies, earned from graduate programs at distinguished universities throughout the world. Students taking courses at any level, introductory or advanced, can be assured that they are taught by faculty with excellent graduate training and earned doctorates, who have a strong commitment to undergraduate teaching and are engaged scholars in their field.

The Major in Religious Studies: “Why Study Religion at Western?”

Religious Studies at Western offers students a unique educational experience. In fact, Western Illinois University is the only state university in Illinois offering a named major in this field. Since Western is a state university offering the nationally recognized GradTrac tuition guarantee over four years and is the most affordable state university, our program combines affordability with intellectual excitement.

After all, religion is an important element in all societies as well as a vital factor in the lives of billions of individuals. A perusal of today’s news headlines reveals that religion is a major determinant of human identity and behavior. Religion plays a vital role in determining how human beings define themselves, articulate their deepest ideals and values, relate to other people, and live their lives. For these reasons, understanding religion is foundational in understanding human cultural experience.

Global citizens need to be conversant in the language, symbols, rituals, and beliefs of the world’s great religions. Due to the interdisciplinary nature of the field of religious studies, it is the quintessential liberal arts major, designed for career preparation in the complex and interconnected global community that will be home to Western Illinois University graduates. Tomorrow’s leaders in all fields of human endeavor, including politics, business, law, and medicine, need to know how to live in the whole world and how to approach and understand cultures radically different from their own. Upon completion of a major in Religious Studies, students will be able to do the following:

- Display an informed understanding of several of the world’s major religious traditions, their internal diversity, and their global significance as an integral part of education for citizenship in a religiously diverse world
- Identify and use a variety of methodological approaches to the study of religion (e.g., historical, textual, social scientific, and performative approaches)
- Analyze both established and emerging religious traditions in terms of their key components of myth, ritual, scripture, doctrines, ethics, or religious experience and examine the existential needs and political-social aims that motivate particular religious expressions

HIGHER VALUES IN HIGHER EDUCATION

- Read, analyze, and develop arguments about the abiding questions that generate and animate religious traditions—questions about meaning, good and evil, and the ultimate nature of reality
- Communicate well, both orally and in writing, within the framework of religious studies

Career Opportunities

The study of religion leads in many directions, giving students an advantage in certain areas of the job market or enabling them to pursue further study in graduate school. A degree in Religious Studies offers students training in a unique combination of skills, including direct observation, critical thinking, effective communication, and cross-cultural understanding. Such skills are in high demand in all professional fields.

Starting with a bachelor's degree in Religious Studies, there are many places to go. As an academic major, the study of religion and religions broadens horizons and imposes no limitations. But it also lends its own particular strengths to a number of different career choices. Religious Studies majors have successfully gone on to graduate work in the following fields:

- *Business*, especially international business and consulting
- *Counseling* and *social work*, which require empathetically understanding others' concerns, including their religious commitments
- *Education*, including secondary, college, and university teaching
- *Journalism*, in which accurate knowledge about religions is now more critical than ever
- *Law* and other professions involving human rights advocacy and social justice issues
- *Ministry*, including rabbis, priests, youth pastors, and chaplains

Others have moved directly into the job market, taking positions in the following areas:

- *Event planning, hospitality*, and other *service industries*
- *Government, foreign service*, and the *Peace Corps*
- *Marketing and management*
- *Museums and the arts*
- *Nonprofit or nongovernmental organizations (NGOs)*
- *Publishing*
- *Community organizing*

Special Opportunities

The department's strong commitment to undergraduate teaching and student learning is evidenced by keeping classes at a size small enough that students can participate actively in class discussions and faculty can get to know students on an individual basis. Faculty members are accessible to students beyond the classroom—during office hours and in informal settings such as student organization meetings and other social functions. Highly personalized advising and career counseling are provided by the department to allow students to make the most of their education at Western.

The Mary Olive Woods (MOW) Trust provides funding for an annual lecture series in which a nationally renowned scholar is brought in for a two-day visit, which includes a lecture and more informal meetings with students and faculty. The MOW Trust also provides funding for student scholarships. Over the past ten years, the department has given out more than \$60,000 in scholarships to deserving undergraduates. Students interested in Asian religions can apply for the Paul Mundschenk Scholarship in Religious Studies.

For More Information

The department is housed in Morgan Hall, with the main office in Morgan Hall 456. Visitors are welcome to stop by the department office. An appointment with the department chair to discuss programs can be arranged by calling (309) 298-1057. Or visit our website at www.wiu.edu/prs.

For Your General Outlook

The Religious Studies major is one that participates in Western's GradTrac program so that students can finish their undergraduate degree in a timely manner—four years or less. Students are encouraged to complete their General Education requirements, including communication skills courses, during their freshman and sophomore years. The Religious Studies major requires core courses in Western and Eastern traditions, a REL 312 "Writing in Religious Studies" course in their junior year, and a REL 490 Capstone Project course in their senior year. Learning about religion is enhanced by taking eight upper-division courses selected from the department's *World Religions*, *Religion and Culture*, and *Religious Thought* subject areas.

[wiu.edu/prs](http://www.wiu.edu/prs)

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