

RELIGIOUS STUDIES MAJOR

Overview

The Theology and Religious Studies Department offers two majors which are distinguished by virtue of both their primary content and their methodological approach. Students may choose one of these majors in conjunction with their other studies, or they may double major within the department and get a degree in both Theology and in Religious Studies.

Religious Studies focuses upon the study of one or more non-Christian religions. Methodologically, Religious Studies is devoted to the study of religion as a fundamental human phenomenon. Its scope is broad, encompassing in principle all forms of religious experience, belief and practice in whatever contexts they are found. Religious Studies is nonconfessional in the sense that it is not committed in advance to any religious (or indeed, non-religious) worldview or doctrine. Religious Studies as we understand it neither endorses a naïve objectivism in the study of "facts" divorced from values nor elevates a single theological, philosophical or scientific principle or program to the level of an unassailable norm. Rather, Religious Studies is intentionally eclectic and open-ended, drawing upon the full range of methods available to the academic study of things human, from philosophy or literary theory, for example, to cognitive science and evolutionary psychology. It is united only by its subject matter, religion as a fundamental, albeit contested, dimension of human experience.

If you are more interested in focusing your studies on Christian Theology, please take a look at the Theology major. (<https://academiccatalog.sju.edu/arts-sciences/theology-religious-studies/theology-major/>)

Learning Goals and Objectives

Goal 1: Students will understand at least two religious traditions beyond an introductory level, including their histories, beliefs, practices and contemporary expressions.

Outcome 1.1: Students will articulate the foundations, historical development, and ethical ramifications of at least one religious tradition other than the Roman Catholic tradition, using sources and methods appropriate to the discipline of Religious Studies.

Outcome 1.2: Students will articulate the foundations, historical development, and ethical ramifications of the basic content of the Catholic faith using sources and methods appropriate to the discipline of Theology.

Goal 2: Students will understand the implications of religious belief for moral decision making and ethical action in the world;

Outcome 2.1: Students will apply the tools of religious studies to understanding the nature of religious conflict.

Goal 3: Students will be able to examine theological and religious traditions from a critical distance;

Outcome 3.1: Students will understand the historical nature of religious texts and traditions, and the tensions that arise within religious communities as they undergo historical change.

Outcome 3.2: Students will recognize and think critically about some of the general features typical of most if not all religions, such

as conceptions of deity, forms of religious community, forms of ritual practice, types of religious experience, ethical norms, etc.

Outcome 3.3: Students will identify and describe the embeddedness of religion in society and culture, as well as the religious dimensions of social, political and cultural phenomena not conventionally identified as "religious."

Goal 4: Students will appreciate the diversity of method, content, and history that exists within the contemporary academic disciplines of Theology and Religious Studies

Outcome 4.1: Students will articulate the difference between religious studies as an academic discipline and theological or confessional approaches to the study of religion.

Outcome 4.2: Students will evaluate some of the most influential methods used in the study of religion and apply them in the study of particular cases.

Requirements

The traditional undergraduate programs includes a minimum of 120 credits distributed across three components: A General Education component divided into Signature Courses, Variable Courses, and an Integrative Learning requirement; a Major and Divisional component; and Free Electives. In addition to course requirements as specified in each area, students must complete one certified course in each of the following overlay areas¹:

1. Diversity, Globalization or Non-western Area Studies,
2. Ethics Intensive
3. Writing Intensive, and
4. Diversity

1

Overlay requirements are part of the 120 credit requirements

General Education Signature Courses

See this page about Signature courses (<https://academiccatalog.sju.edu/curricula/#signature>).

General Education Variable Courses

See this page about Variable courses (<https://academiccatalog.sju.edu/curricula/#variable>). Six to Nine courses

General Education Overlays

See this page about Overlays (<https://academiccatalog.sju.edu/curricula/#overlay>).

Eight variable core courses, three integrative learning courses and three overlay requirements. These latter may or may not require students to take an additional course.

General Education Integrative Learning Component

See this page about Integrative Learning Component (<https://academiccatalog.sju.edu/curricula/#integrative-learning>). Three courses:

Students in the Religious Studies major must strengthen their skills in the study of religion by taking three complementary courses in other departments in the College of Arts and Sciences. Students have

considerable flexibility in choosing these courses because familiarity with a wide variety of issues, methods, and tools is vital to the academic study of religion. Students must choose three courses from the following categories, with no more than two of these courses may be taken in any one department. These three courses may be drawn from any program and or department that focuses on:

1. Cultural and historical contexts of various religious traditions, such as Ancient Studies, Asian Studies, Classics, Fine Arts, History, Latin American Studies, and Political Science;
2. Methodologies that are applied in the study of religion, such as Biology, Economics, Philosophy, Psychology, and Sociology;
3. Research tools that are employed in the study of religion, such as Computer Science, Mathematics, and Foreign Languages.

Courses used to satisfy the Integrated Learning Requirement may not fulfill a GEP Common Core or Variable Core Requirement. Students should consult with their advisors to determine what courses are best suited to their own interests in Religious Studies when choosing the courses needed to satisfy the integrated learning requirement.

GEP Non-Native Language

No non-native language unique to the department is required. But it is recommended that students consult with their advisors to fulfill the GEP non-native language requirement with a language relevant to their religious or theological interest.

GEP Electives

Any 11-14 courses, depending upon how many overlays are taken as part of the courses for the major.

Major Distribution

Ten courses distributed as described below. At least eight must be at the 200-level or above. GEP courses will be used to partially satisfy the major concentration. Additionally, one must be a comparative course and one must concentrate on a South or East Asian religion.

No one course may be counted more than once for the various requirements of the major. However, some courses might be eligible for more than one category. In those cases, students can choose which category the course would be applied to, in consultation with one's advisor or the department chair. Students should consult with their advisors or the department chair to determine the best distribution of courses relative to their own interests and needs, both in their major and Integrated Learning Courses.

1. Non-Christian Religions, six REL courses (including Variable Core GEP Religious Difference Course).
2. THE 154 THE 154 Faith, Justice and the Catholic Tradition (GEP Signature Core course)
3. Institutional Identity Course: one additional THE course in any level in New Testament, History of Christianity, Systematic Theology, or Theological Ethics
4. Variable Elective: Any one course in THE or REL at the 200 level or above.
5. Methodology Course:REL 395 Approaches to the Study of Religion or REL 495/THE 495 Theories and Methods in the Study of Religion
6. Graduating seniors must demonstrate that they have completed at least one significant research paper in theology or religious studies.

This can be done in various ways, such as part of a standard course, an independent study, or an Honors thesis. Students should consult with their advisors to determine the route that would best fit with their course plans and interests.

Honors Requirements

Students who are majoring in Theology or in Religious Studies and are in the Honors Program can choose one of two options for fulfilling their Honors Program Requirements:

- 1) Students can choose to complete the two semesters honors thesis as described in the Honors Program materials. The thesis is normally done in conjunction with two independent study courses with a faculty mentor.
- 2) Students can choose to complete a "capstone course sequence." This capstone will take the form of "upgrading" two standard courses or independent studies in the major to Honors-level expectations. These courses will be selected in consultation with the student's faculty advisor, and would typically be connected with the requirement for the major that "graduating seniors must demonstrate that they have completed at least one significant research paper in Theology or Religious Studies."