

CLEMSON UNIVERSITY
COLLEGE OF ARCHITECTURE, ARTS, AND HUMANITIES
REQUESTING TO OFFER A NEW DEGREE PROGRAM
BACHELOR OF ARTS
IN
RELIGIOUS STUDIES

Submitted to the South Carolina Commission on Higher Education
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Bachelor of Arts in Religious Studies

Academic Unit: College of Architecture, Arts, and Humanities

Name of Program: Religious Studies

Name of Degree: Bachelor of Arts

CIP Code: 380201

Implementation Date: August 2013

Number of Credit Hours: 120

Program Length: 4 years

STEM Applicability: No

CIP Code: 38:9999

Site: Clemson University campus, traditional delivery

Contact Person

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Introduction

The proposed B.A. in Religious Studies degree is an interdisciplinary humanities program that focuses on the *academic* study of the world's religious traditions and how they are related to almost every aspect of human existence (psychology, sociology, ethics, philosophy, language, economics, science, etc.). Courses in the "Judeo-Christian" tradition are already offered regularly in the Philosophy and Religion Department, but, given the rapid globalization of the past two decades, Clemson students need regular and sustained exposure to the religious traditions that animate the other half of the globe.

The B.A. in Religious Studies provides grounding in the histories, scriptures, rituals, mythologies, ethics, and beliefs of religious communities as they have been situated in specific geo-political contexts throughout the past three millennia. It should be emphasized that the program is not intended to indoctrinate students into one particular religion or to teach them to become religious, but is focused rather on studying how religion motivates, provides meaning for, and helps to organize human life. A strong program in Religious Studies trains students to be global thinkers with a deeper understanding of the world's cultural, political, and social differences. Whether in business, education, health care, legal, ministerial or social-service professions, our students will be better informed and better equipped to be world citizens.

Program Justification

Wider Cultural Need – The number of religion and philosophy majors in the United States has doubled since 1970.¹ This trend will likely continue in light of the recent survey data from the Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life that reveal widespread ignorance about religion among Americans, particularly among those who consider themselves the most religious.² In the post-Holocaust and post-9/11 world, we have been continually reminded that such ignorance can no longer be accepted. While the West once had high hopes that reason and science could rid the world of conflict, the postmodern world has awakened to the reality of entrenched community interests, often animated by strong religious belief and practice. The growth in students majoring in the academic study of religion is related to this wider cultural realization.³

Employability – Because of the inherently interdisciplinary nature of a program in Religious Studies, majors go on to be successful in a number of fields. Some go on to seminary and enter the ministry. Others pursue graduate work in religion and become educators. Still others pursue work in non-profit and service-related industries, both domestically and overseas. Religious Studies students often go on to pursue medicine and law and provide unique voices within the health-care and legal systems. In a recent study, philosophy and religious studies students ranked second only to physics and math students on the LSAT.⁴

If the highly religious are the least knowledgeable about religion in a world in which global politics and economics are often animated by religious disputes (cf. the escalating tension between Iran and Israel or the recent problems in Afghanistan by the accidental burning of Qurans), it would stand to reason that South Carolina citizens would benefit greatly from a program in the academic study of religion. Students who hope to compete effectively in international business need to understand other societies' cultures and their religions.

Thomas Greene Clemson's will describes the university that he envisioned as a "high seminary of learning." While Clemson University has never been nor will ever be a religious institution, our founder's choice of language, "a high seminary," has religious overtones which point in the direction of training students for service to the state of South Carolina. Clemson's first cadets began their day with "morning prayer, Scripture reading, hymn, and announcements."¹

Anticipated program demand and productivity:

The general interest in the academic study of religion here is already strong. The ten to twelve General Education courses in Religion offered at Clemson each semester, which are not required by the University, are always full. Each of our Religion faculty receives numerous requests to add students who are unable to get into them. More pertinent, a recent, informal, email survey of our current undergraduate Religion minors (30 students) and those majoring in Philosophy with a concentration in Religion (11 students) suggests that a stand-alone B.A. in Religious Studies would be a viable and successful option for those who want to go beyond our Gen Ed curriculum.⁵ Students who want to study religion at Clemson are finding some limited ways to do it. Our department already graduates students each year who go on to do further graduate work in Religion or to seminary. In the recent past we have had students go on to Wake Forest, Duke and Princeton. The addition of the B.A. in Religious Studies would only increase this trend and better meet these students' specific interests/needs.

Assessment to extent to which the proposed program duplicates existing programs in the state:

Only two of South Carolina's public universities offer B.A. degrees in Religious Studies (College of Charleston and USC-Columbia) and neither of them offers a master's degree in Religious Studies. The Religious Studies department at USC-Columbia has undergone some recent changes and has eliminated its M.A program. Neither of the other two Upstate members of the system (USC-Upstate and Lander) offers the program. Clemson's B.A. in Religious Studies would thus help fill this regional curricular void.

In order to ensure that the program could regularly offer courses in Islam and provide the kind of curricular depth to make our program the standard bearer for the academic study of religion in the state, opportunities exist to work with USC-Columbia and the College of Charleston who have 5 and 7 permanent faculty in religion, respectively. The use of on-line shared instruction with the College of Charleston and/or USC- Columbia might be of benefit to all three institutions.

Relationship of the proposed program to existing programs at the proposing institution:

The B.A. in Religious Studies would fit, naturally, within the scope and vision of our university as a place that recognizes the integrated nature of human flourishing. Business and industry leaders consistently describe their ideal employees as those who come from Humanities programs (like Religious Studies) that train students to communicate, think, imagine and analyze problems in creative and critical ways.¹ This is more necessary today than ever before, as one must be thoughtfully aware of one's place not only in South Carolina but in the world. The religious studies courses are not required, but augment the student's program of study.

Relationship of the proposed program to other institutions via inter-institutional cooperation:

Sixteen of the top eighteen public universities in the latest *U.S. News and World Report* rankings (2012) offer B.A. degrees in the academic study of religion. A number of our land-grant peer-institutions, including Purdue, Virginia Tech, and N.C. State, have successful major programs in this field. The addition of this program to the menu of liberal arts options at Clemson, then, is both in keeping with our founder's vision and in step with institutions for which we are aiming in our 2020 Plan.

Current Assets and Future Costs of the Program

The Philosophy and Religion Department has two tenure lines committed to Religious Studies:

- Steven Grosby (Hebrew Bible, Judaism, and Ancient Near Eastern Religions)
- Benjamin White (New Testament, Early Christianity, and Greco-Roman Religions)

Two lecturers, Peter Cohen and Robert Stephens, help field additional Gen Ed courses in Religion. A third lecturer from History, Jim Jeffries, has, on occasion, taught a course on American Religions. A number of regular faculty members in other departments have research interests in religion and offer courses related to their research. The addition of a B.A. in Religious Studies would help support their work and bring new students to their courses:

Yanming An (Languages: Buddhism in China)
Leslie Williams (Languages: Shintoism and Taoism in Japan)
Laura Olson (Political Science: Religion and American Politics)
Melinda Denton (Sociology: Sociology of Religion)

Proposed new funds required: \$26,000 for a shared faculty member with Global Studies.

FOOTNOTES

¹ <http://www.rowan.edu/colleges/las/departments/philosophy/ReligiousStudiesRevival.pdf>.

² <http://religion.blogs.cnn.com/2010/09/28/dont-know-much-about-religion-youre-not-alone-study-finds/?hpt=C1>

³ http://www.religiondispatches.org/archive/culture/3448/studying_religion_is_suddenly_popular
http://www.religiondispatches.org/archive/culture/4636/why_the_world_needs_religious_studies/

⁴ <http://mikeandreani.wordpress.com/2011/08/31/the-Isat-101-problems-and-the-law-aint-1/avg-Isat-scores-by-major/>

⁵ Each of these was asked: "The Department of Philosophy and Religion is interested in your input on the following question: Would you have *considered* either majoring or double-majoring in Religious Studies if the Department had provided the option of a stand-alone B.A. in Religious Studies requiring approximately 30 credit hours of major coursework?" Their response options were:

- a) Yes, I absolutely would have considered it.
- b) Yes, I probably would have considered it.
- c) No, I would not have considered it.

Of the minors who responded, 9 answered "yes, absolutely," 3 answered "yes, probably," and only 4 returned with "no." Of the majors, 7 of the 8 who responded said "yes, absolutely."