

RELIGIOUS STUDIES

Religion has been one of the most important, inspirational, and, arguably, problematic aspects of human culture. At Lawrence, the religious studies department seeks to educate students about the diversity, complexity, and richness of the historical and philosophical dimensions of some of the world's religions. Because we recognize that religion lies not in one aspect of human culture and experience, but permeates all aspects, students become familiar with a variety of approaches needed to study the wide range of religious expression. Thus, religious studies at Lawrence is both comparative and inter-disciplinary in its approach.

Courses in Christianity, religions of Asia, and Islam form the core offerings of the department in which you examine cultural and social expressions of those religions – sacred texts, rituals, instances of ecstasy and enthusiasm, reflective writings, and institutions – at a particular period, over time, and in relation to broader historical, philosophical, and ethical issues.

CURRICULUM

In any given year, there are about 15 students majoring in religious studies. Each major has ample opportunity to work closely with faculty members. As a religious studies major, you are required to take *Introduction to Religious Studies* and the *Seminar in Methodology*. Both courses are designed to introduce you broadly to important concepts and theories and to give you a comparative and multi-traditional background in the study of religions.

You are free to choose from a variety of courses to complete the remaining seven courses for the

religious studies major. Courses are offered in three major areas – Christianity, Islam, and Hinduism/Buddhism– and you must take at least two courses in two of the three areas. In the case of the Hinduism/Buddhism area, the two courses must be in the same tradition (i.e., either Hinduism or Buddhism).

As a junior or senior, you will have the opportunity to supplement your course offerings by taking a tutorial or an independent study in an area that interests you; this can also become an Honors Project in which you write a thesis that is orally defended before a panel of three faculty members. Past topics for tutorials and for honors project include:

Anna Stirr, “Towards Sonic Understanding: Sound in Yoga Practice and Philosophy”
Justin Ritzinger, “Taixu: To Renew Buddhism and Save the World”

Paul Lamb, “The Land of Milk and Honey: The Changing Conception of a Promised Land in the Abrahamic Tradition”
Laura Scholl, “Dostoevsky’s Underground Man: An Embodiment of Despair and Offense”

The minor in religious studies comprises five courses: the *Introduction to Religious Studies*, two courses in an area of your choosing, one course in an additional area, and one seminar-level course. The minor in religious studies particularly complements major programs in Anthropology, Art History, East Asian Languages and Cultures, English, History, Philosophy, and Psychology.

FACULTY RESEARCH

Professor Karen Carr focuses on modern western religious thought and comparative religions with special interest in philosophy of religion. Her first book, *The Banalization of Nihilism*, examining twentieth-century responses to meaninglessness,

was placed on *Choice's* Outstanding Academic Book List. Her second book, co-authored with P.J. Ivanhoe (University of Michigan), is entitled *The Sense of Antirationalism: The Religious Thought of Zhuangzi and Kierkegaard*.

Professor Dirck Vorenkamp is a specialist in Buddhist studies. He has written numerous articles for professional journals, including "Evil, the Bodhisattva Doctrine, and Faith in Chinese Buddhism: Examining Fa Zang's Three Tests." His book, *An English Translation of Fa-tsang's Commentary on the Awakening of Faith*, was published by The Edwin Mellen Press in 2001.

Professor Martyn Smith works on the Arabic literature of Medieval Islam. His dissertation was on places of pilgrimage and how they become a locus of identity and meaning. He just completed a post-doctoral fellowship in Cairo in which he translated a chapter on pyramids from al-Maqrizi's *Khitat*. He has enjoyed traveling and living in the Middle East.

Post-doctoral Fellow Karen Koenig specializes in history of Christianity (especially the Reformation), the intersection of religion and literature, and American religious history. Her current research focuses on questions of family relationships and obedience during the Reformation.

AFTER LAWRENCE

Lawrence's broad liberal arts education, in religious studies as in any other liberal arts major, is the finest preparation for the entire range of professions. Graduates of the religious studies department have gone on to study at Harvard University, the University of Chicago, the University of Iowa, the University of Michigan, St. Andrews University, and the University of Indiana, among others.

FACULTY

Karen L. Carr, professor Oberlin College, B.A.; Stanford University, A.M., Ph.D. Interests: modern western religious thought, philosophy of religion, and comparative religious thought

Dirck Vorenkamp, associate professor University of Tulsa, B.S.; University of Kansas, M.A.; University of Wisconsin-Madison, Ph.D. Interests: Asian religions, Buddhism

Martyn Smith, assistant professor Prairie College, B.Th.; Fuller Seminary, M.A.; Emory University, Ph.D. Interests: pilgrimage, Arabic travel narratives, literature and theory of place, preservation of cultural landscapes

Karen Koenig, postdoctoral fellow Lawrence University, B.A.; University of Chicago, M.A., Ph.D. Interests: the history of Christianity (especially the Reformation), the intersection of religion and literature, and American religious studies