Religious Studies

Overview

As a religious studies major, you engage in a rigorous course of study centered on your interests across religious traditions, sects and practices. You will study religion from historical, social, cultural and applied perspectives (e.g. religion and public life, Islam in the U.S., and religion and popular culture); explore major religious traditions including Buddhism, Christianity, Confucianism, Daoism, Hinduism, Islam and Judaism; and delve into newer religious movements, such as Mormonism, Rastafarianism and Scientology. Through this interdisciplinary study, you gain the ability to analyze religion and religious phenomena through the key human conditions of race, gender, sexuality and class.

Student and Faculty Engagement

You have abundant opportunities to work closely with faculty in Religious Studies. Our students have traveled with faculty to Bangladesh, Israel and Jordan, as well as to national conferences. Many religious studies students undertake independent studies with our faculty, exploring topics such as religion and contemporary media, indigenous responses to Christian missions, religion and popular culture, and memory and trauma. Advanced students in the major serve as teaching interns in courses such as “Introduction to Religion,” “Cults and Conversion” and “Religion and Public Life.” Additionally, the Religious Studies Student Advisory Board plans public events throughout the year on topics such as Jerusalem now and then, global expressions of Islam, and religion and food.

Religion in the World

The study of religion moves fluidly between the classroom and the world at large. You can pursue the study of religion in conjunction with international relations, economics, the arts, law and politics. Our department regularly partners with the College’s interdisciplinary centers, including the Toor Cummings Center for International Studies and the Liberal Arts, the Holleran Center for Community Action and Public Policy and the Center for the Comparative Study of Race and Ethnicity (CCSRE).

Nora Britton

Religious studies

Q: What led you to the major in religious studies?
A: I stumbled upon it freshman year when I took “Religion and the Spirit of Politics.” It was one of my most challenging, engaging courses, and inspired me to take more classes in the department. The major has enabled me to study a wide range of subject matter, from Dante’s Inferno to the Sunni Awakening. Each faculty member has taken a genuine interest in my success here, and I’ve enjoyed their mentorship both inside and outside the classroom.

Q: What role has CELS, the career office, played in your academic experience and career plans?
A: An award from the Sophomore Seminar Research Program funded by the Mellon Foundation allowed me to pursue an internship related to a project I developed on wartime trauma. Cheryl in the CELS office helped me identify possible options, edited cover letters, and conducted a mock interview. As a result, I interned with the nonprofit group, Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America and had a terrific summer in New York City.

Q: What type of independent research have you participated in?
A: After my internship another student and I together pursued an independent study with Professor David Kyuman Kim titled “Memory, Trauma and Society.” It led us to examine the ways in which trauma destroys, impacts and stimulates world views. I concluded the project with a paper, “On Hearing Trauma,” which I submitted to the Elie Wiesel Prize in Ethics Essay Contest and for which I am a finalist.
Faculty

Natalie Avalos, Visiting Assistant Professor of Religious Studies
B.A., University of California, Berkeley; M.A., Ph.D., University of California, Santa Barbara
Native American and indigenous religious traditions; Tibetan Buddhism; religion and healing; race and religion; transnationalism; decolonization

Lindsey B. Harlan, Professor of Religious Studies
A.B., Occidental College; M.T.S., M.A., Ph.D., Harvard University
History of religions; Buddhism; Hinduism; religion and gender; heroic traditions; religion in Trinidad

David Kuyman Kim, Associate Professor of Religious Studies; Associate Professor in American Studies; Religious Studies Department Chair
B.A., University of Rochester; M.Div. & Th.D., Harvard University
Philosophy of religion; religion and critical theory; religion and political theory; modern and contemporary religious thought; human agency, moral philosophy and ethics; religious theory; Asian-American studies

Sharon Portnoff, Associate Professor of Religious Studies
M.A., Ph.D., Jewish Theological Seminary; M.Ed., Harvard University; B.A., St. John’s College
Modern Jewish thought; Holocaust theology; Dante; Primo Levi; Israel

Sufia Mendez Uddin, Associate Professor of Religious Studies
B.A., Colgate University; M.A., Clark University; Ph.D., University of Pennsylvania
Global Islam; religion in South Asia; women and religion

Selected Courses

Holy Books: The Western Scriptural Tradition; Religion and Public Life; Global Islamic Studies; Fundamentalisms; Jewish Ethics; Religion and the Spirit of Politics; Cults and Conversion in Modern America; Pilgrimage; The Holocaust and Theology; Religion, Trauma, Commemoration and Celebration; Islam in the United States; Religious Expressions of Everyday Life; Memory, Identity and Religion

About Connecticut College

Connecticut College is a private, highly selective liberal arts college with 1,900 students and more than 40 majors in the arts, sciences, social sciences and humanities, and the option for students to self-design majors. The College offers a high level of intellectual challenge, and a campus culture that supports students to tailor their educational experience to their own interests and goals. A four-year career development program teaches students how to translate a liberal arts degree into a first job or graduate school admission.

For more information, visit www.conncoll.edu/academics/