The religious studies concentration in the Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies provides students with a thorough understanding of the nature of religion and its role in the world. Religious Studies students gain a foundational understanding of many of the great religions of the world including Hinduism, Buddhism, Taoism, Christianity, Judaism, and Islam, by examining their history, sacred texts, beliefs, rituals, and ethics. A Religious Studies concentration also provides students with a comprehensive understanding of the many ways religion affects our world on a personal and collective level. A Religious Studies concentration prepares students for success in a range of fields by giving them the tools to read texts carefully, to write clearly and effectively, to think critically, and to work collaboratively to solve problems.

A concentration in religious studies prepares students for any career that requires a deep understanding of human motivations and an appreciation of diverse perspectives and values, such as social services or cross-cultural endeavors, and for graduate training in religious studies in universities or seminaries with a view toward teaching or church-related vocations. It is also excellent preparation for post-graduate work in other liberal arts disciplines leading to careers in a wide range of scholarly or professional fields. The skills and capacities developed through the disciplined study of religion are applicable to virtually any career and can readily be integrated with the requirements for nearly any entry-level job. More than a preparation to make a living, the academic study of religion prepares one for living as a critical and participating member of the world community.

Religious studies is an academic discipline pursued within the context of the liberal arts. In this discipline religion is approached as a type of human experience and behavior, as a phenomenon found among all peoples of the world throughout history. The academic study of religions does not seek to induce belief or to determine which religion is “correct”, but to understand the doctrines and practices of religions and the human sources and consequences of faith. Persons of virtually any or no personal religious faith may profitably engage in the academic study of religion.

Religious studies majors are required to take PHIL 111, Introduction: Knowledge, Reality and the Human Condition, PHIL 112, Introduction: Ethics and Society, RELN 111, Introduction to Religion, and RELN 112, Survey of World Religions, as part of the core requirements of the major. These four courses make up the major’s Core Requirement classes.

Eighteen additional credit hours of Religious Studies coursework in the areas of Sacred Texts, Regional Traditions, Comparative Themes and either a capstone course or an internship are required to earn the major.

Religious studies courses differ greatly from one another depending on the topics, the level, and other factors. Typically, religious studies teachers emphasize not only what is said in the texts and what is done in various religious practices, but why it is said and done and what students themselves think about the matter.

Students majoring in religious studies are encouraged to pursue a second major or a minor in any discipline of their interest. Among the most frequently selected fields are History, Psychology, Sociology, and Foreign Languages.

Students intending to go to a seminary or to graduate school in religious studies or another liberal arts field are strongly encouraged to supplement the major with studies in a foreign language.

For a teaching position in religious studies at the college or university level, an advanced degree is essential. Employment in the ministry generally requires specialized training beyond the Bachelor’s degree. There are, however, many church-related careers for which advanced study is not required. And because the skills and abilities gained through the academic study of religion are applicable to virtually any vocation, a bachelor’s degree in religious studies qualifies one for a wide range of entry-level positions in business, social work, government service, and education.
Career Options
As recent studies show, employers want, and reward, many of the capacities which the academic study of religion develops: the ability to communicate effectively in speech and in writing, to generate and organize ideas, to analyze and summarize complex data, and to perceive issues from many perspectives. Thus, while many Philosophy and Religious Studies majors pursue careers in education and in church-related organizations, there are people trained in religious studies in just about every field: social work, government service, counseling, journalism, law, and international relations.

To apply for admission:
For undergraduate programs contact the Office of Admissions, Box 6903, Radford, VA 24142 or you may apply online. For specific information on admissions and financial aid, see the RU website at www.radford.edu.

Dr. Paul Thomas
Chair and Associate Professor
Ph.D. University of Missouri-Kansas City
pthomas15@radford.edu

Dr. Kay K. Jordan
Professor
Ph.D. University of Iowa
kjordan@radford.edu

Dr. Susan Kwilecki
Professor
Ph.D. Stanford University
skwileck@radford.edu

Dr. Carter Turner
Associate Professor
Ph.D. Iliff School of Theology, University of Denver
cturner5@radford.edu

Dr. Russell Gregory
Professor Emeritus
Ph.D. Vanderbilt University