

## Why minor in Religion at Westminster?

There are many reasons, both personal and professional, why one might want to take courses in the Religion at Westminster College. Here are four of the most often common reasons.

**Cultural Appreciation:** The term `religious studies' refers to the scholarly neutral and nonadvocative study of multiple religious traditions. Thus the academic study of Religion at Westminster promotes the awareness and understanding of other cultures. In fact, it is difficult to see how any field of study that ignores religious issues can understand other cultures, for such an approach would ignore the deepest and most adamantly held beliefs of those cultures.

**Ethical Awareness:** Since, for many, religious beliefs form the basis for ethical and moral convictions, any approach to ethics would, hopefully, incorporate the kind of examination of various religious convictions that Religion courses makes possible.

**Interdisciplinary Studies:** Since Religion is an area rather than a single field, it utilizes the methodologies, procedures, and content of many different disciplines (such as Psychology, Sociology, Anthropology, History, and Philosophy).

**Critical Thinking:** the academic study of religion helps students distinguish between arguments and convictions, and between statements of fact and statements of belief. Religion courses also help the student assess claims of truth, value, revelation, and morality.

The academic study of religion involves the examination of many forms of religious life, including the great religious traditions (Buddhism, Christianity, Islam, Judaism, Hinduism, Zoroastrianism), using a variety of methods (historical, textual, philosophical, social scientific). Definitions and theories of religion are integral parts of the subject matter.

## Careers in the religion field

A minor in Religion offers preprofessional education in the general liberal arts. This is the kind of background that many employers want in a college graduate: (1) cognitive learning skills; (2) critical awareness of international cultures and traditions; (3) good writing and reading skills; (4) ability to handle and interpret difficult texts and primary data. Graduates of Religion departments throughout the United States and Canada have found careers in medicine, law, business, journalism, politics, civil service, ministry, social activism, as well as high school and collegelevel teaching. Clearly, a Religion minor offers broad access to many options. It deals with values; it speaks to contemporary issues; it investigates the historical and cultural foundations of the very institutions with which we live today. But besides the vocational reasons to pick this minor, you should consider the intrinsic value of increasing your power of understanding.

The study of religion offers useful preparation for participation in a religiously diverse society and for a wide range of careers (e.g., social work, law, teaching, leadership in religious organizations). As with other programs leading to the Bachelor of Arts degree, however, the study of religion is intrinsically valuable and satisfying and can be pursued for its own sake.

## Graduate study in religion

If you are considering graduate work in Religion, be certain that the program to which you apply does not require a religion major for applicants. Westminster College does not offer a major in Religion. Many graduate programs in religion will consider applications from any liberal arts major and the Religion minor, however. Philosophy, history, anthropology, and psychology are

especially appropriate as areas of study for those considering graduate work in religion. Knowledge of Greek and Latin is necessary for success in graduate school.

There are three avenues of postgraduate study in Religion:

- Seminary: exclusive study in a particular religion, for work in its ministry.
- Theology: the philosophical study of God (M.A. or Ph.D.).
- Religious Studies: the critical study of religious issues and traditions (M.A. or Ph.D.).

Talk to your advisor about what course of study would best prepare you for your choice from among these three broad areas. Of these three broad areas, graduate work in Religious Studies is most common. Even here, however, the Masters and Doctorate degree are only available in Religious Studies at a small number of Universities. The following is an example of a graduate program in Religious Studies (at the University of Iowa):

#### MASTER OF ARTS

The M.A. is designed for people who want to advance and deepen their understanding of religion. The degree may be taken with or without thesis.

The degree requires 30 semester hours of graduate work in religion, 24 of which must be taken at Iowa. Requirements for foreign languages and other research tools vary according to the area. The M.A. examination, taken after the completion of course work, tests the student's competence in the area of specialization. The M.A. thesis, which may account for 6 of the 30 semester hours, enables the student to learn the skills necessary to pursue scholarly work.

#### DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

The School of Religion offers a Ph.D. program that:

- Focuses on a major area of religious studies;
- Places religion in a broad intellectual and cultural context;
- Has a substantial methodological dimension;
- Develops research skills necessary to undergird effective teaching;
- Provides the opportunity to develop teaching skills.

An interdisciplinary component that sets religion in its cultural context is provided, especially through course work in other departments.

Training in methodology and a range of approaches to the study of religion is developed in the course "Methods and Theories in the Study of Religion," in proseminars, in courses cotaught by faculty from different areas, and in courses offered in other disciplines.

The ongoing School of Religion Colloquium affords the opportunity to exchange views on relevant topics. The purpose of the Colloquium is to give faculty and students the chance to reflect on major questions and problems in religious studies across disciplinary boundaries.

Research skills are acquired through the writing of seminar papers. Each area of study requires competence in the languages of original sources and secondary scholarship. The School of Religion has created a unique series of advanced readings courses in German and Latin that develop facility in the use of these languages as tools for understanding scholarly discourse.

Teaching assistantships offer students the opportunity for up to three years of experience leading discussion sections of the School's General Education Requirement courses. A required teaching colloquium treats topics such as teaching methods, course development, and examination construction. Although the Ph.D. focuses on a particular area, the faculty will certify other areas of teaching competence in which the student has taken at least four courses.