

Stanford University

# Religious Studies

Religion can inspire and provoke, unite and polarize. Whether practiced behind closed doors or demonstrated in the streets, religion has been a fundamental force throughout history in shaping culture, politics, and society. By studying religious beliefs and practices, you embark on a journey to understand one of the most complex aspects of humanity.

# Why study religion?

*Religion is the primary expression of humanity's quest to find meaning and purpose. Understanding this phenomenon helps us explore the most basic questions of our existence.*

What does it mean to be human?  
What do we owe others?  
Why are we here?

From politics and art to science and war, the study of religion opens a gateway to understanding the world around us. Religious literacy is key to global citizenship in the 21st century.

Despite the technological advances of modern society, religion remains a fundamental part of the human experience. Religious Studies teaches us how diverse cultures, past and present, have imagined the universe and their place within it.



# Start Here

Want to grapple with profound ethical and theological questions? Or learn about histories, texts, and traditions, and the people who shape religion? Begin with our gateway course *Religion Around the Globe*. Or try *Is Stanford a Religion?*, which examines how the university's culture resembles a religion through its myths, rituals, and taboos.

Then dig deeper with the **Exploring** series—an introduction to the world's great faiths. Follow up with courses that examine how religion relates to violence, gender, politics, and justice:

- **Religion and the Environment**
- **Gandhi, Nonviolence, and Religion**
- **Ethics of Religious Politics**
- **Issues in Liberation: El Salvador**
- **Christianity in 21st-century America**

# Beyond the Classroom

*From exploring holy sites around the world to participating in lively events on campus, enhance your understanding of religion's role in history and society:*

## *Howard M. Garfield Forum for Undergraduates*

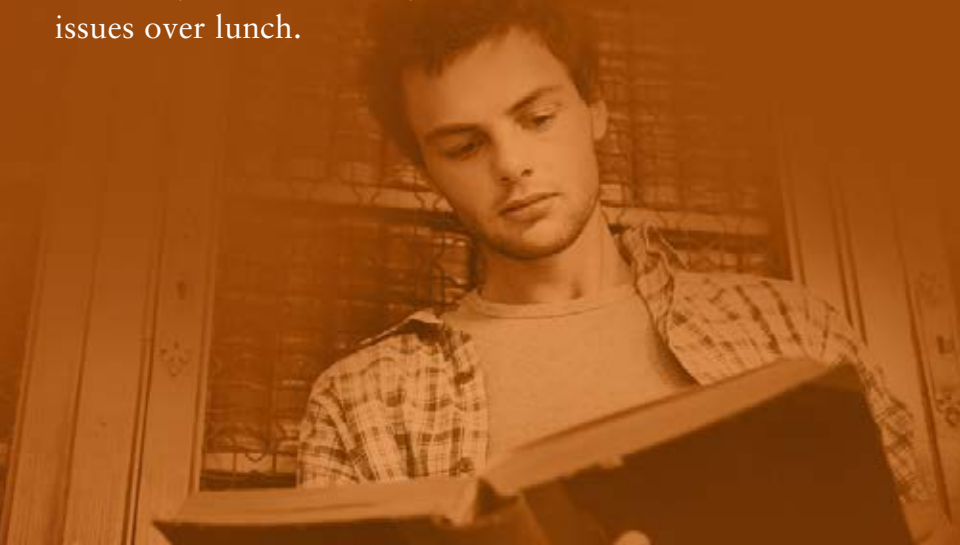
Examine how ethics influences subjects like “Religion and the Environment” and “Christian and Islamic Perspectives on War.”

## *Stanford Initiative for Religious and Ethnic Understanding and Coexistence*

Participate in events that revolve around global conflict and reconciliation.

## *Interfaith@Noon*

In this student-initiated course, engage with prominent university and community leaders to discuss interfaith issues over lunch.



# A Successful Future

*Critical thinking. Cultural awareness. Persuasive argument.*

The study of religion prepares you for more than a career—it prepares you for life. A religious studies degree equips students with skills to enter a wide range of careers including law, education, medicine, journalism, government, the non-profit sector, and spiritual leadership. Religious studies alums are civil rights activists, Hollywood film writers, motivational speakers, and college professors.

“Majoring in religious studies and philosophy meant pushing myself to the edge of my intelligence, grappling with questions that really mattered, and building deep relationships with brilliant, dedicated professors.”

Michael Shaps, BA '97  
Religious Studies and Philosophy, MA '98,  
Commercial Litigator





“Any major can equip a young writer with the basic toolkit of critical thinking, reading and scholarship, but no other can introduce you to so many wonderful things to write about.”

Michael Green, BA '95 Human Biology and Religious Studies,  
Film and Television Writer, credits include “Green Lantern,” “Heroes,” and “Smallville”

“Although my job may seem completely unrelated to philosophy or religious studies, the worldview that I developed in the joint major guides me every day. Stanford provided me with a strong foundation in critical thinking and communication skills, as well as an abiding concern for the human condition.”

Miriam Swords Kalk, BA '11 Philosophy and Religious Studies,  
BS '11 Physics, MA '12 Religious Studies,  
Instructor of Math and Physics at Udacity

“My professors and peers in Religious Studies taught me to value many voices and, occasionally, to revel in their contradictions. It's hard to seek out and consider opinions that challenge my own. But at the nonprofit where I work, it's clear that engaging a diversity of beliefs can catalyze positive social change.”

Kellie Brownell, BA '09 Religious Studies, MA '09 Sociology,  
Donor Relations Coordinator, Electronic Frontier Foundation

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