DEPARTMENT FOR STUDY OF RELIGIONS

FACULTY OF HUMANITIES

UCT

THINKING ABOUT A MAJOR IN THE STUDY OF RELIGIONS?

You can get a degree in the Study of Religions through a BA (Bachelor of Arts) or a BSocSc (Bachelor of Social Science). Both Bachelor degrees include 20 semester (half year) courses. You need 8 in your first year, and either 6 or 8 in your second year. The last 4 or 6 semester courses are done in your third year.

Prerequisites:

(i) For any 2000-level REL course: Second-year status or permission of the Head of Department.

(ii) For REL3037F: completion of any two REL 2000-level courses; second- or third-year status; or permission of the Head of Department (second year students who are majoring in Politics would be given standard HOD allowance to take this course).

(iii) For REL3042S: completion of any two REL 2000-level courses; second- or third-year status; or permission of the Head of Department (second year students who are majoring in FAM would be given standard HOD allowance to take this course).

FIRST YEAR: take one of the following:

Religions Past and Present (REL1002F): This course offers a general introduction to the cross-cultural and interdisciplinary study of religion. Drawing on examples of method and theory in religious studies, the course provides a survey of the historical development, doctrinal diversity and distinctive practices of African and Asian traditions.

Judaism, Christianity and Islam (REL1006S): This course explores the historical foundations of Judaism, Christianity and Islam by examining the formation and development of sacred texts, techniques of interpretation, and religious practices within those traditions. The course analyses the continuity and diversity of historical traditions, social formations and religious identities in a contemporary global context.

African Religious Traditions (REL1017S): By treating Africa as a religiously pluralistic continent, the course foregrounds African Endogenous Religions and the broad array of African Christianities.

SECOND YEAR: take two of the following:

Religion and Society (REL2040F): This course aims at introducing students to the study of the social dimension of religion. The course covers some classics in the

sociology of religion to more recent developments in the anthropology of religion and religious studies engaging with issues of the interplay between religion, the economy, politics, and the public sphere in varied global contexts.

Religion, Sexuality and Gender (REL2047F): This course explores ideologies of gender and sexuality in the history of religious traditions, focusing particularly on the role of women in religion. Special attention will be given to how gender is symbolized in religious myth and ritual practices, exploring how this relates to women's lived experiences.

Psychology of Religion (REL2048S): This course explores how particular dominant psychological approaches frame the role, function and nature of religion in relation to human, wellbeing, health and illness; as well as how selected religious traditions present a framework for the formation of selfhood, health and the good life. We explore the ways in which religious narratives in a variety of religions provide conceptions of identity and consciousness, techniques of self-formation and transformation while also opening onto the social and intersubjective notions of self.

THIRD YEAR:

Religion and Politics: (REL3037F): What is the relationship between religion and politics as well as religion and violence? This course examines the interplay of religion with politics (considered in a broad sense) and the role of religion in social conflict and violence locally and internationally.

Religion and Media: (REL3042S): Religion's relationship with media begins with the voice and the text- the written word and the oral tradition of storytelling – as well as with accompanying visual signs. The investment of these means of communication with a sacred power is foundational to both religion and myth. In this course we analyse religion through the media as well as the use made by religious organizations of a variety of media tools (for example, TV, movies, and animation movies). We focus in particular on South Africa, Africa and Japan.

The field of the study of religion is very flexible and offers you the great opportunity to combine your major with a huge variety of other disciplines. The most common combinations chosen by our students are with Sociology, Anthropology, Film and Media Studies, Arts, Political Studies, Gender Studies, and Psychology.

WHY STUDY RELIGION?

Religion is a powerful force in society, politically and in the lives of the majority of people in the world.

Find out more about the tradition you grew up in and other religions, and about the role of religion in today's society, its interplay with politics, the media, gender, and much more.

Discover the ways in which religions grapple with questions of personhood, meaning-making and the nature of reality while creating diverse forms of community

Be at the forefront of solving problems and developing a better South Africa and the world.

WHICH TRADITIONS ARE TAUGHT?

Islam
Christianity
Judaism
African Traditional Religion
Asian Religions
Buddhism
Hinduism
Comparative religion and the history of religious thought
New religious movements

WHAT CAN I DO WITH A MAJOR in the STUDY OF RELIGIONS?

You can contribute to public life as an informed and engaged person.

You can bring your critical thinking skills to a wide range of careers.

A religion major contributes to careers in social work, psychology, facilitation, NGO work and journalism, as well as religious vocations.

WHAT DO PEOPLE DO WHEN THEY FINISH THE STUDY OF RELIGIONS?

Many people are interested in continuing their studies further. The department offers internationally acclaimed Honours, Masters and PhD programmes in religion.

Others go on to have successful careers in a wide range of fields. For example
Debora Patta – **journalist**
Phillip Dexter – **political spokesperson**
Karl Jechoutek – **economic analyst**
Raphaella Delle Donna – **filmmaker**
Barney Pityana – **academic**
Ruben Richards – ex head of **Scorpions**

Staff research areas and possibilities available for postgraduate research:

Prof. Elisabetta Porcu (Head of Department)
Asian Religions, Japanese Religions, Religion and Society
Elisabetta Porcu is an Associate Professor of Asian religions and Head of the Department for the Study of Religions at the University of Cape Town. She is a South Africa's National Research Foundation (NRF) B2-rated researcher.

Before moving to South Africa, she worked at various universities in Japan (2004-2010) and taught Japanese religions at the University of Leipzig (2010-2014). She has been Visiting Research Scholar at the International Research Center for Japanese Studies (Nichibunken) in Kyoto (2013-2014), Numata Visiting Professor of Buddhist Studies at the University of Hawaii (2013), and Visiting Professor at Kyushu University (2016-2017). Among her publications are the monograph Pure Land Buddhism in Modern Japanese Culture (Brill, 2008), the volume Matsuri and Religion: Complexity, Continuity, and Creativity in Japanese Festivals (co-edited with Michael D. Foster, Brill 2020, 2021); and various articles and book chapters, including "Gion Matsuri in Kyoto: A Multilayered Religious Phenomenon" (2020); "Religion, Second Modernity and Individualization in Japan" (2018); "Contemporary Japanese Buddhist Traditions" (2017); and "Pop Religion in Japan: Buddhist Temples, Icons and Branding" (2014).

Elisabetta is the founding director of the Center for the Study of Asian Religions (CSAR) at the University of Cape Town; the founding editor of the Journal of Religion in Japan (Brill); and has served on the executive committee of the Association for the Study of Religion in Southern Africa (2017-2023, ASRSA President 2021-2023).
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Prof. Sa'diyya Shaikh (PG Convener)
Islamic Studies, Feminist Theory
Sa'diyya Shaikh (PhD Temple University, 2004) is Professor in the Study of Religions at the University of Cape Town. She specialises in the study of Islam, gender ethics, and feminist theory. She has published

on gender-sensitive readings of Muslim textual traditions, including Qur'an, hadith and Sufi texts; theoretical and political debates on Islam and feminism, religion and gender-based violence; Sufism and Islamic Law; contemporary Muslim women's embodied, experiential and everyday modes of understanding Islam and negotiating religious teachings; and marriage, sexuality and reproductive choices amongst South African Muslim women. Her current work is focussed on developing constructive research and artistic projects around egalitarian ethics, spirituality and imagining inclusive, justice-based Muslim futures.

Sa'diyya is active on a number of community fora for the empowerment of Muslim women, and contributes to feminist knowledge building projects of Musawah, a global movement for justice and equality in the Muslim family, and has presented talks at the Claremont Main Road mosque regularly. She is director of the Centre for Contemporary Islam at the University of Cape Town.

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Dr Ala Alhourani (UG Convener)

Islam, Religion and Ethics

Dr Ala Alhourani is a senior lecturer in the Department for Study of Religions. His PhD research is on the aesthetics of Islam and Muslim performances of citizenship, conviviality, and differences in South Africa's post-apartheid secular state. His post-doctorate research explores the aesthetic of religion and everyday ethics in public life. His research foregrounds aesthetic experiences of religion as embodied ethics, knowledge, power, and traditions. His research interests are Islam in Africa, Sufism, anthropology of religion, Islamic Studies, secularisation, art and aesthetics. He is a writer and a filmmaker.

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Prof. Asonzeh Ukah

Christianity in Africa, African Religions

Professor Asonzeh Ukah is a renowned scholar specializing in Christianity and African Religions, holding a position in the Department for the Study of Religions at the University of Cape Town. Since 2021, Prof. Ukah has served as the director of the African Centre for Religions, Ethics, and Society (A.C.R.E.S) and previously directed the Research Institute for Christianity and Society in Africa (RICSA) between 2014 and 2022. With nearly thirty years of experience, Prof. Ukah has been instrumental in researching and documenting the dynamics of socio-religious change in Africa, with a particular emphasis on Pentecostal-Charismatic Christianity and emerging religions. Fieldwork has taken him to various African and European countries, including England, Germany, Nigeria, Ghana, Lesotho, South Africa, Uganda, and Cameroon. Prof. Ukah boasts an extensive publication record, encompassing 50 book chapters, 24 peer-reviewed articles, and other contributions, covering diverse fields such as the sociology of Pentecostalism, the history of African indigenous religious traditions, the intersection of religion and media, sacred urbanism, and African new religious movements. From 2014 to 2020, Prof. Ukah served as an editor of Brill's Studies of Religion in Africa series and, since 2019, as a co-editor of Africa: Journal of the International Africa Institute. Trained as a historian of religion and sociologist of religion, Prof. Ukah's multidisciplinary approach informs their ongoing research on "Miracle Cities" or Prayer Camps across Africa, exploring the intersection of Pentecostal urbanism and religious market competition in evolving cityscapes. Teaching African Religions and Pentecostalism at the University of Bayreuth, Germany, from 2005 to 2013, Prof. Ukah has been affiliated with the University of Cape Town since 2013, offering instruction and guidance to graduate students in areas such as African Religions, the History of Christianity, Sociology of Pentecostalism and the media, and Theory and Research Methods in the Study of Religions.

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Vacant

Jewish Studies

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The **Department for the Study of Religions** is on the 5th floor of the Leslie Social Sciences Building, Upper Campus

Check us out online:

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