Although many students from all across the University of Alabama enroll in religious studies courses to fulfill the University’s core curriculum “humanities” or “writing” requirements, some choose to major, double major or minor in the study of religion. Doing so allows them to examine in greater detail the histories and functions of a wide variety of texts, myths, rituals, symbols and institutions. In the process, they take small upper-level classes, get to know professors with national and international scholarly reputations, and acquire skills that enable them to describe, compare, interpret, and explain–skills that they will use long after leaving the religious studies classroom. And, as home of both the Aronov Endowed Chair in Judaic Studies and the director of the cross-disciplinary Asian studies program, students can also pursue a minor either in studying Judaism or Asia–past and present.

Religious studies–also known as comparative religion, the science of religion, the history of religions, or just the academic study of religion–is part of the human sciences (such as sociology, anthropology, etc.); it was first established in Europe as an academic discipline in the late 19th century (at the same time as such other fields as comparative languages) and, since the mid-1960s, has also flourished in U.S.public universities because it is a non-normative field. Much as political science constitutes the study of the political process itself rather than the promotion and participation in specific party politics, the descriptive and cross-culturally comparative study about religion as carried out in the publicly-funded university is to be distinguished from religious (theological) forms of study that seek to advance specific religious viewpoints. Instead, the academic study of religion aims to examine the history and contemporary forms taken by religion(s) as well as study the history and contemporary implications of using the category religion to name aspects of human behavior.

Apart from requirements that apply to all students in the College of Arts & Sciences, the only prerequisites for religious studies students are an interest in cross-cultural work in different historical periods and a curiosity about the many ways that human communities, past and present, have devised for creating worlds in which to live and act.

An REL Honors Track (requiring a regular seminar designated as an Honors Seminar plus an Honors Thesis [REL 400]) is now available; to learn more please speak with the REL advisor no later than your Junior year if you are interested.

Also, each Spring the Department hosts its own undergraduate research symposium, to highlight to work done by our students.

Learn more about REL on the web at http://religion.ua.edu or visit the Department’s blog (where faculty, students, and grads all regularly post); you can find us on Vimeo and you can visit the department on Facebook as well as find out information on our student association, or follow us on Twitter @StudyReligion.

- Major
  - Religious Studies (BA)
- Minors
  - Religious Studies
  - Asian Studies
  - Judaic Studies

Chair
- McCutcheon, Russell T.

Professor
- Trost, Theodore L.

Associate Professors
- Jacobs, Steven L.
- Ramey, Steven W.

Assistant Professor
- Altman, Michael
- Finnegan, Eleanor
- Loewen, Nathan
- Simmons, K. Merinda
- Touna, Vaia