

# **The Department of Religious Studies The University of Tennessee, Knoxville**

## **STRATEGIC PLAN Spring 2012**

The Department of Religious Studies promotes the historical and critical academic study of religion as a crucial component of the study of world history, global cultures, and contemporary politics. The Department offers an undergraduate major that emphasizes a multi-disciplinary, cross-cultural approach to the study of the world's religions. We offer both breadth and depth, with a balance between the study of the past and present, and between global and local religious phenomena. Our diversity provides students with method-, tradition-, region-, and issue-specific approaches to the academic analysis of religion. Some of our graduates go on to top graduate programs in religion and area studies; many others use their training to pursue careers in education, law, government, religious and social service, non-profits, business, and the media.

### **VALUES**

The Department of Religious Studies is committed to the neutral and non-confessional study of religion, which promotes a commitment to critical inquiry, global awareness, respect for diversity, and civility within and outside of the classroom.

### **MISSION**

The mission of the Department of Religious Studies is:

- To provide a high-quality program for the academic and non-confessional study of religion(s) to a diverse student population in the state of Tennessee;
- To attract some of UT's most talented students and equip them for the best graduate programs or for professional careers that require a nuanced understanding of how religions relate to history and culture, both at home and abroad;
- To prepare students to be knowledgeable and critically engaged citizens of the global community;
- To foster the development of critical thinking, reading, and writing skills;
- To support faculty research, instruction, and professional activities that achieve national and international distinction;
- To engage in innovative collaborative research and teaching, both at the University of Tennessee and beyond;
- To be a University leader in promoting intercultural and international learning through research, teaching, and service, both on and off campus;
- To play an exemplary role in promoting the University's mission to encourage civility, respect diversity, and foster civic responsibility;
- To sustain a working environment of intellectual freedom, equal opportunity, and affirmative action for faculty, staff, and students.

## **VISION**

The vision of the Department of Religious Studies at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville (UTK) is to be one of the top 10 public university undergraduate programs in the country for the critical, comparative, and cross-cultural study of religion.

## **GOALS**

### **I. Provide a diverse undergraduate student body with a quality program in the academic study of religion.**

The Department of Religious Studies has long had a strong commitment to undergraduate teaching. Our curriculum services our majors and minors as well as the College and University. We offer a range of courses on specific religious traditions, geographic areas, and comparative topics. These courses expose students to a variety of religious histories, cultures, and societies. We also provide instruction in the core ideas as well as the latest developments in the critical, comparative, cross-cultural study of religion.

1. Regularly review and update the Department's undergraduate program and the diversity of course offerings.
2. Provide excellent advising and mentoring for our majors and minors that helps students to build a course of study, identify career paths and goals, and facilitate a timely graduation.
3. Support undergraduate research and encourage students to share their research at conferences and through publications.
4. Support the University's Ready for the World program by providing undergraduate courses on diverse religious traditions across the globe, and by encouraging majors and minors to pursue study-abroad opportunities.

### **II. Support graduate education and interdisciplinary research**

Because of the multidisciplinary nature of Religious Studies, the Department is uniquely positioned to support education in a variety of fields. The Department's faculty members are committed to supporting both graduate education and interdisciplinary research. To this end, all faculty contribute to the graduate programs in other disciplines and the College Scholars program by mentoring students, directing theses, and regularly serving on College Scholars' and graduate committees.

1. Continue to serve on and direct M.A., Ph.D., and College Scholars committees.

2. When relevant, invite graduate students to share their research at our Departmental seminar.
3. Organize and contribute to multidisciplinary faculty research seminars that can provide opportunities for graduate and undergraduate student participation.
4. Teach cross-listed and graduate-level courses for graduate programs in other departments.

### **III. Promote, support, and reward faculty excellence in research**

The Department encourages and promotes the research activities of its faculty and supports UT's land-grant mission by fostering the critical, comparative, and cross-cultural study of religion in Tennessee. The Department of Religious Studies has built a strong national and international reputation in the academic study of religion over its nearly 50-year history, through the research, publications, and professional activities of past and present faculty.

1. Support the preparation of grant and fellowship proposals by faculty.
2. Continue to showcase the scholarly and creative accomplishments of the Department's faculty.
3. Support the presentation of research at prominent national and international meetings by Religious Studies faculty.
4. Present research at UTK Department and faculty research seminars.
5. Support scholarly outreach activities that carry out our land grant mission by building relationships with the community.

### **IV. Continue to build, support, and retain an outstanding faculty in the Department of Religious Studies**

The Department of Religious Studies is a diverse community of outstanding scholars and teachers committed to the Department's mission and vision. The Department seeks to strengthen its mission and vision through the appointment of new tenure-line faculty, effective mentoring of junior faculty, and by providing a collegial workplace that values diversity and supports continuous professional development.

1. Increase the number of tenure-line faculty in the Department, especially in the fields of Chinese Religions and Religion in the Americas, in order to fulfill our mission in a public land-grant university, and to build a program that is comparable to the programs of our aspirational peers.

2. Support the continuous professional development of tenure-line faculty.
3. Promote participation of the Department's faculty in scholarship-enhancement opportunities, such as Faculty Development Leaves and Professional Development Awards.
4. Offer excellent mentoring to junior faculty.

## **V. Increase the resource base that the Department of Religious Studies has available to accomplish its goals.**

The Department continues to seek internal and external funds to support faculty research, teaching, and service. This support will strengthen the Department's contribution to the University's goal to become one of the top 25 public research universities.

1. Facilitate and maintain a significant level of contact with alumni, friends of the Department, and donors through the strategic use of print publications, digital publications, and social media.
2. Update departmental strategic and development priorities on website.
3. Develop and maintain databases of alumni, friends of the Department, and donors.
4. Enhance national and international communication of Departmental activities and accomplishments.
5. Develop public events and courses that have potential for development initiatives.
6. Work closely with the College's Office of Development and the Department's Board of Visitors to strengthen development possibilities and to engage current and prospective donors.